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Adventure

Talbot Mundy
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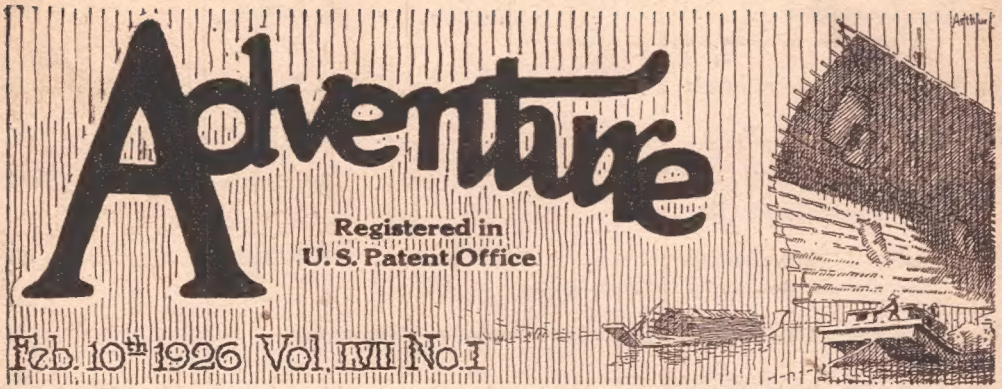

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Contents for February 10th, 1926, Issue

Hard-Rock Men *A Complete Novelette* . . . . . **Will Levington Comfort** 3
Gold Country—more precious than fine gold.

Gone Native . . . . . **S. B. H. Hurst** 29
Burma—the vault of many voices.

Billy Dixon and Adobe Walls *The Old West* . . . . **Raymond W. Thorp** 41

The Landsman Killer . . . . . **John Webb** 42
Atlantic—a criminal is too careful.

A Lamb and Some Slaughtering . . . . . **William Byron Mowery** 55
Canada—the trooper was unsuspecting but tough.

The Messenger of Destiny *A Three-Part Story Part I* . . **Talbot Mundy** 66
Ancient Rome—who would save Britain must be crafty.

Tlick Lats *A Complete Novelette* . . . . . **Charles Victor Fischer** 102
China—shore leave was his undoing.

La Rue of the 88 *Conclusion* . . . . . **Gordon Young** 115
West—cowpunchers shoot it out.

**Occasionally one of our stories will be called an "Off-the-Trail" story, a warning that it is in some way different from the usual magazine stories, perhaps a little different, perhaps a good deal. It may violate a canon of literature or a custom of magazines, or merely be different from the type usually found in this magazine. The difference may lie in unusual theme, material, ending, or manner of telling. No question of relative merit is involved.*

(Continued on next page)

(*Continued from preceding page*)

Touching Tengmalmi . . . . . **F. St. Mars** 139
English Coast—owls are a curious folk.

Maple Sugar *Pioneer Sweets* . . . . . **F. W. Hodge** 144

The Loading Shed *A Poem* . . . . . **Helen Von Kolnitz Hyer** 145

Intrigue—Mexican . . . . . **John Dorman** 147
Texas—the night has ears.

State Paper *A Complete Novelette* . . . . . **F. R. Buckley** 156
Old Italy—the monk could handle a rapier.

The Camp-Fire A free-to-all meeting-place for readers, writers and adventurers 176

Old Songs That Men Have Sung 183

Camp-Fire Stations 183

Various Practical Services Free to Any Reader 183

Ask Adventure 184
A free question and answer service bureau of information on outdoor life and activities everywhere. Comprising seventy-four geographical sub-divisions, with special sections on Radio, Mining and Prospecting, Weapons, Fishing, Forestry, Aviation, Army Matters, North American Anthropology, Health on the Trail, Railroading, Herpetology and Entomology.

Lost Trails 190

The Trail Ahead 192

Headings . . . . . **A. Schweider**

Cover Design . . . . . **H. L. Murphy**

One Complete Novel and Two Complete Novelettes

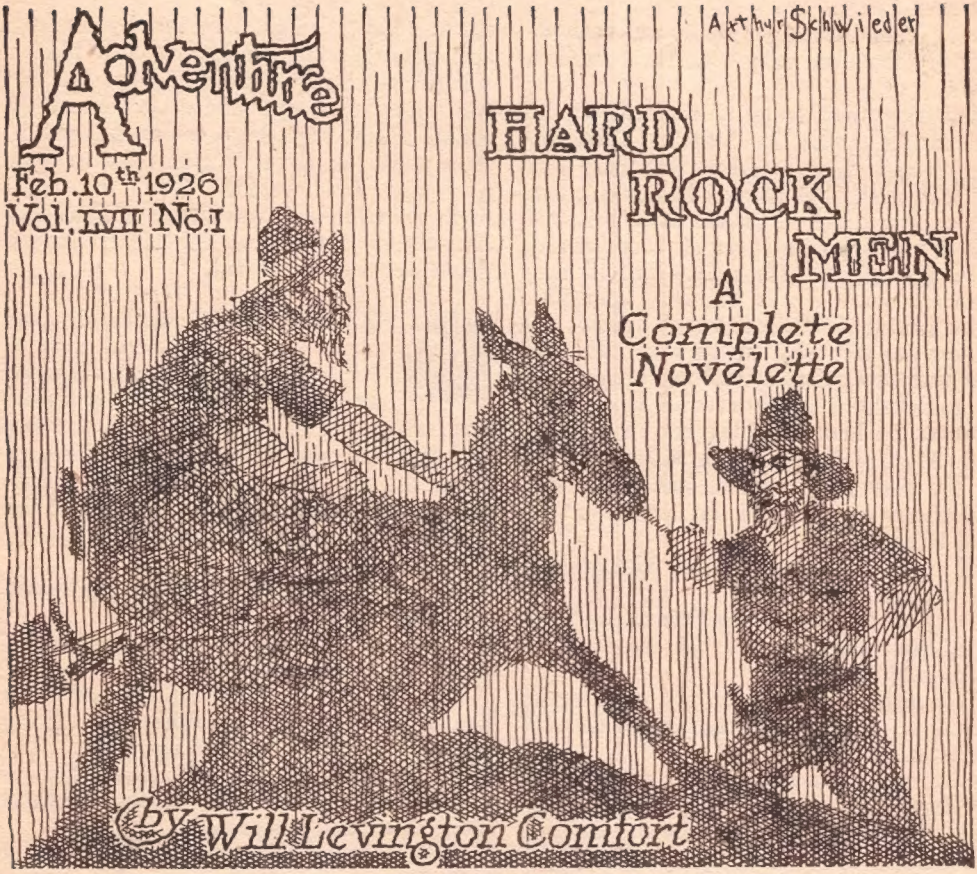
"WHAT'S your regiment?" the German officer asked the wounded American. "You'll never know," the doughboy replied. And then *Sheehan*, whose real name was *Wladichesnikov*, proceeded to tour Germany and Belgium. "A MATTER OF BUSINESS," a complete novel by Leonard H. Nason, will appear in the next issue.

NONE could read the eyes of the malicious second steward. It took more than one voyage to discover what he wanted. "PRATT" is a complete novelette, by W. Townend, in the next issue.

"SO YOU discover criminals by their dreams!" sneered crafty *Hira Dass*. "Then what did you dream in the temple last night?" "A PASSAGE TO BENARES," a complete novelette by T. S. Stribling, will appear in the next issue.

Other stories in the next issue are forecast on the last page of this one.

***Adventure* is out on the 10th, 20th and 30th of each month**



Author of "A Reviving Wind."

CLEM DANIELS was twenty-five and had worked in a blast mill on the Monongahela since he was eighteen, when he decided to go up into the Yukon country after gold. That very Saturday he quit, drew his savings, put on his black Sunday suit and set out. A soft drizzle of rain was falling. At the railroad station he looked back upon the town. The night shift was on at the mill, the two north stacks flaming full-tilt and sky-high. Clem always had his own names for things.

"The Red Hole," he muttered, designating the town and the furnaces and the whole district. "And I ain't likely to be back."

On the wharf at Seattle and several times on the crowded steamer up the coast, he nodded to one certain round-faced chap, evidently burning under the same gold incentives as himself. This fellow left for the Pass with an outfit just ahead of Clem, but weeks afterward when the latter was helping to build his own boat to go down the river, he looked up from his work to find the familiar countenance smiling at him from farther up the bank.

"Supposed you'd be down the river, havin' picked out your gold mine by this time," Clem said.

"I would have—only I got tails. There were three of us and the boat would only hold two. My name is Matt Stobart," he added, picking up a plank that Clem was just ready for and handing it to him in the most natural way.

They fitted rather easily together.

"Where do you come from, mister?" Clem asked, minutes afterward.

"Michigan—barber up in the Copper Country."

"You don't look soft—"

"Barberin' the hunkies ain't so soft as it

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looks. Their beards get pretty well cemented in by the time they look for a barbershop."

That day their laughter sounded on the river banks, especially Matt's. Clem enjoyed himself more quietly. Anything that had to do with Clem Daniels had to be quiet. If there was action, he made little of it. A look of apology came over his face for any quick movement. He suffered embarrassment for another who betrayed emotions. As for raising his voice, it wasn't in him.

Clem was tall, with narrow face. He still wore that black Sunday suit and a black felt hat, pulled down tightly over his eyes. That night as he bent over the river's edge to wash, Matt Stobart saw him without his hat for the first time. There was a red rim around his temples and forehead from the tight band.

"I never feel rightly dressed with my hat off," he said.

They cooked coffee together and it happened that they liked it the same way—strong and black.

"I'd rather have my canned milk in the pancakes," said Matt, "but I can do with plenty of sweetenin'."

After supper he brought out a big bag of gumdrops he had been saving from Skagway. Clem tried one, but it wasn't his kind of a party. He twisted up a brown paper about the size of a match.

"What makes you roll your cigarets so small?" the other asked.

"I ran out of tobacco once," said Clem, "and learned to like paper."

Matt studied him in silence. He didn't smoke and looked as if he'd be greatly relieved if the other didn't. He confided his theory that Clem's smoking might some time lead him into more serious temptation. This outcropping of morality awed Clem. It developed that Matt had a fear, part fascination, of alcohol.

They made Dawson, but hardly looked the town over. It was early summer and their passion was to get to some gold-creeks farther on. Waking, they talked of gold; sleeping, they dreamed of it. Nights along the big river flared the fires of the stampeders, some singing and shouting; other silent groups where gamblers dealt in the flickering light of gummy pine knots.

Eureka, Hunker, Forty Mile—other men were finding theirs, yet Clem and Matt circled and back-tracked like dogs on a lost scent. Toward Fall their faces were lean and grayish from driving tension; Matt's temper, especially, a trifle on edge, but the gold lure went deeper and deeper into their bones. Here and there colors showed in their pans, but never in quantities to compare with their dreams. Other men were finding theirs—that was the great burn of it all. So they went on, till winter banged down like a clenched fist.

THEY hadn't adequately prepared for it, barely had time to locate a cabin on the Sad Sermon and get it stocked. They hadn't been altogether alone up to this time; being forced to mix with other miners, had helped them see the values of their partnership. The cold became metallic. It gripped the country like a casing of iron that slowly began to shrink.

Clem Daniels had a way of keeping his hat on in the house.

"If you don't take that hat off you'll get bald," Matt warned.

Clem raised his hands and closed them upon the black rim on either side, lifting straight up as if to loosen a stovepipe. The black felt came off, but a bluish-red line remained around his temples and forehead where the band had pressed.

"I'm a barber, I ought to know," Matt added.

Within ten minutes the hat was on again. Irritation thickened in the air. Clem hadn't the remotest idea yet that Matt Stobart was beginning to hate the sight of him, hat on or hat off; but he did know that Matt's whistle the way Matt cleared his throat, and Matt's tireless discussion of the set of printed Sabbath school lessons which some humorist had left in the cabin, were putting thoughts of murder into his brain.

That Sabbath school set wasn't all. Matt Stobart seemed to attract this sort of thing. There was a magazine cover, with an Easter painting—crisp stars in navy blue, a saintly young mother in red and blue robes looking down at her child, the hint of a benighted earth at the side, just beginning to catch the holy beams. The name of "Bronson Munn" in square gold letters, as confessing to responsibility for the painting, stood out at the lower right. Clem wouldn't have minded the picture, except for Matt's taking it so hard. Standing before it, the barber from the Copper Country confided the

sacred grief of his life that he had been cut out for the ministry, but had wandered astray.

"Bronson Munn," he pronounced with lips that trembled, "I'd sure like to meet up with him some day, and tell him what his picture's done for me—"

Clem was badly embarrassed. He reserved his idea of what he should say in such a meeting with Bronson Munn.

Neither man had heard of cabin-fever, but that was what they were coming down with. Clem was astonished at himself, not having thought of hating anybody before. He would lie on his bunk looking up at the shadowy ceiling, thinking of brilliant things to say, that would have withered Matt's pious soul, while from somewhere in the room would come to him a monotonous, tuneless rondo from the other's lips. It was like a wire upon which was strung all he hated—sunless cold, bad food, loneliness, mocking gold dreams—all the dingy beads of discontent in the world. One morning Clem woke to find the other bending over him with face all white and trembling with repression. "Say, mister, can't you stop that snoring?"

"Sure. Why, I'll stay awake, Matt, till you get to sleep."

Another day when Matt was shaving him the razor pressed his throat curiously, and Clem looked up to find an alien glitter in the other's eyes. That's how he came to know Matt felt the same as he did. He sat still in the chair, but it was a test of nerve. After that he let his beard grow.

Gradually what little levity was left went out of Clem's life, not a chuckle remaining. Months had passed; days were longer again; a moment of such tension was reached that something had to break. Matt Stobart's voice filled the cabin:

"I drew lots once before for a boat that wouldn't hold three. I'm drawing lots now for a cabin that can't hold two."

Light broke in Clem Daniels' soul. He didn't care whether he was the one to stay or go—only to be free again.

"You match me," Stobart said, planking down a silver dollar on the littered table.

Clem placed one beside it under his hand and both hands lifted.

"You did. You get the boat—I mean the cabin," Matt muttered, and then his mood softened. "Mind if I take a little clean-up before I get out?"

For two weeks Matt had been talking about getting a bath.

"Sure—as much as you like," Clem said aloud. "Sing a few hymns for yourself if you like," he added in undertone.

Matt was bringing in pails of snow to melt in the wash-tub before the open fire. Farther and farther back into the cabin Clem shrunk as the steam rose and the other undressed. Firelight burned high; a kind of haze of hell wavered in the room between Clem's eyes and all he hated in the world—naked, unashamed and whistling.

Matt was lifting the hot tub to a low box. He must have stepped upon a live cinder with his bare foot, for the tub was plunked down too heavily upon the box, and a thin, steaming sheet of water flung itself out upon the bare body, which dropped to kneeling posture, a moan breaking out of the writhing upturned face.

Clem's first thought was that the other was making a lot of fuss over a douse of hot water. He had seen men burned in the iron mills—something to squirm about. He helped Matt to his bunk and ran to the cook shelves, dipping his hands into a bowl of bacon-grease.

No trouble to tell what part was burned and what wasn't. He could see the angry red rising under Matt's white skin. He covered the burns with the grease and sprinkled on white flour; at the same time he recalled that the bacon gravy was salty. Matt's pain began to burn into him. There hadn't been anything else to do. The salt would fight the fire, but the agony in the cabin was certainly melting Clem down. Through the hours of that first night after the burns, the curious idea possessed him that perhaps his own thoughts of hatred had something to do with the accident; coldly the idea grew also, that he must dress those burns.

It was worse than he had thought. Yes, a man could go out of his head and hear church bells from pain like that. The outer skin was lying around like wet rags. Hatred had vanished; only grief remained. It would be weeks. A man might even die of burns like that. Two months afterward the cabin door was opened to stay open. Matt Stobart, showing bluish-white under his beard, looked out of the doorway on a snowless world. His eyes were still hollow from suffering, his back bent forward at the hips from the tightening of scar-tissue. He had

been mighty touchy at times through the days of convalescence, but Clem hadn't seemed to notice. Matt breathed with noisy delectation—a smell of raw earth in the air. The ground was soaked with snow-water still, and there were little rills running everywhere, but except in the deeper hollows, the blanket of snow was gone. The deeper frost steamed out of the ground.

Back from the shadows of the cabin came Clem Daniels, hat on tight. He looked half a foot taller than the other and also there was a look, part nervous, part joyous, in his eyes.

In the next few months they saw other men find gold; steal gold, die for gold. But their luck didn't change. They had tried many of the camps and were now making their living, working for other men. For the most part they were still a trifle shy with each other, but since the cabin days, hadn't been altogether alone for any exhausting stretch. Another winter in the Yukon was more than either cared to face. They looked back at Juneau from the ship. Matt's eyes stretched along the gray coast-line and back into the white mountains.

"She sure gave us the cold shoulder," he muttered bitterly.

"Say—that does pretty well for a name for Alaska—at least, for me," said Clem, "The Cold Shoulder." And so they came to designate the whole experience.

II

FOR three days they had sloshed about rainy Seattle, neither able to make a break. Matt had talked a lot about reopening a barber shop in the Copper Country, but had some trying excuses for not buying his ticket east; and Clem wasn't hearing the dingy waters of the Monongahela nor any whistles from the blast mills calling him home. The Red Hole was checked off as finished in his consciousness, quite as finished as the Yukon. They had less than three hundred dollars between them and nothing to do but go, but they dropped into the Fashion Bar on the third evening, instead of keeping on through the portal of the railway station. They went to a table, and Matt was forlorn and desperate enough to order a glass of beer with his sandwich.

"Sure, I drinks when urged," came a chirrupy voice from the bar.

A short-legged, stiff-backed individual there was doing a lot of talking about Southern California. The group of Seattlers around him appeared willing to buy drinks for the privilege of telling him how they loved every rain-soaked road in their town. The man from South looked like a sawed-off shot-gun in their midst. His chest and arms were sizeable enough; it was his legs that let him down. His thick back was held very straight, in fact, he seemed to bend backward as he looked up passionately into the faces around him, not bending his neck, so much as his spine. He always looked hard at a drink for several seconds before taking the risk. Then he would help himself with both hands. It was as if the right hand rebelled a little, and the left shot in to force the issue.

The voices were irritating. The partners were blue. Other people always made them see new values in each other, and this made it harder to think of going different ways now. Clem reached into a pocket and drew out a pinch of tobacco and dusted it on to a brown paper, twisting up an attenuated smoke. About this time the high thin tones of the short-legged one jerked them both.

"Sure, I says—gold's my business, gents."

Clem and Matt looked at each other.

"Yes, sir—ee," yelled the old man. "That's where I come from—little old Ardiente, Californy. My name is Hassayampa. I'm on my way to Alaska and I drinks when urged!"

"He's goin' up to the Cold Shoulder," breathed Clem.

"—Ardiente, Californy and goin' to Alaska! Haven't missed a gold rush since '88. Gold, mister? That's my business."

The bartender suggested to the old man to be a little more quiet. Hassayampa took this as a mark of attention.

"Why do I leave my gold mines in Ardiente—headin' north? 'Cause I got to git there, boys. Gold ain't all in findin', I says. Ask 'em back in Ardiente if old Hassayampa ain't done his share of findin'. Gold's in the seekin', I says—old Hassayamp's the seekinest—"

Matt and Clem had turned gray—from their own failure. The talk of gold sickened them like the sight of an undone task. Hassayampa's voice carried on:

"Tain't all havin', half the fun's in seekin'. Ask 'em back in Ardiente if old Hassayampa's nest ain't feathered, yet off he's flown, ain't he?"

"That old caterpillar ought to be subdued," said Matt.

A crowd of lumberjacks pressed into the Fashion Bar, drowning the voice. Matt and Clem fell back into their own stony study, until it became apparent that Hassayampa was coming their way, the lumbermen having shunted him out. He was teetering sideways on his shaky legs; his hands at the end of long arms were big enough for a man twice his size. His huge rounded fists hanging in front had a foreshortened look like a freak photograph.

"Glad to see you boys here," the clacky tones announced. "I've been seein' you two from the beginnin'. You look like sure-enough gold men to me."

Clem and Matt disclaimed any such thing, but admitted that they had just come from Alaska. Hassayampa almost screamed at that. He couldn't be fooled on a couple of faces that had once been turned to the lure o' gold.

"Where'd you see us before?" Matt demanded.

"Through the mirror, boys. Never take my eyes off the mirror back of a bar. Can't tell whose going to come in the door and shoot up a man in the howdy-do. Yes sir-ee, Ardiente, Californy is sure weepin' for old Hassayamp tonight—"

He had drawn a chair close and leaned back. His Adam's apple nodded like an old head. Out of his pocket he drew a piece of quartz the size of an egg in which little gobbets and flecks of yellow metal gleamed.

"—all the time sizin' up you two through the mirror, knowin' you fur hard-rock men. Ever see the like o' that? Runs bettern' two thousand to the ton, boys."

The partners looked close, feeling the mockery of fate. In Alaska getting out gold had been muddy and mucky work.

"Is that the way gold comes in California—all put up pretty like that in white rock?" Matt inquired.

"Just like that, boys—ten-foot vein where that come from. And little old Hassayamp found the place. Ever hear of Tuerta Canyon?"

They hadn't.

"Nor the Holy Water?"

"No."

"Guess you've been away for a long time—"

"Quite some time," said Clem, and then advanced the question of the moment. "But how is it you're leavin' a mine like that to go up to Alaska?"

Hassayampa opened his shirt collar and held out his hands, palms toward them, as if rending himself utterly.

"Fellers, I can feel a gold rush three hundred mile away. Feet a-trampin' wakes me up in the night. Gold's my business but it ain't all in findin'. Some men dies of drink, boys, but old Hassayamp never misses a gold rush—"

"It's a cruel gamble up there," Clem went on. "We spent nearly two years and only made wages."

Hassayampa started up with the cry of a loon and thumped his hand on the table.

"Didn't I tell 'em—didn't I tell 'em all the time that it was only a big land-company graft! But I've got to go. I'm goin', so I can say I seen it. Say, why don't you fellows go back to Ardiente and wait for me. I'll be back there before you can say 'knife.' "

III

"HARD-ROCK men." Hours of talk of gold and Ardiente, the spell stealing into the partners deeper and deeper. They wouldn't have to go different ways. Ardiente wasn't cold like Alaska; wasn't wet like Seattle. Vaguely Clem and Matt were picturing a land of sun-browned mountains and painted mesas—gold in lodes—two thousand to the ton—little old Ardiente looking one way into the glare of the desert and the other way up into the mountains.

"Besides," Hassayampa granted cautiously, "them as don't hook on proper to their claims can bide their time workin' in the Smelter."

This didn't lure Clem. It sounded too much like the blast furnace, but Hassayampa, before teetering off to his ship, had divulged that many a gold man down on his luck had used the Ardiente Smelter to scrape together a grub-stake, so he could go prospecting again. Alone the partners sat, each waiting for the other to say something about a start south. Clem's lips at last began to move:

"Tuerta Canyon, the Holy Water, Ramshorn Bench, Yellow Lily Springs, Blue Jay Meadows, Hassayampa's Lode—they've sure got pretty names for things in Southern California, but it's all about as clear to me, Matt, as if he had said that there was a

horseshoe lyin' in the mud somewhere between here and the post-office."

"But you go to Ardiente first, that's simple enough," said Matt, breathlessly eager. "And there's gold in California that ain't never been found yet."

"There sure is," said Clem. His eyes held to the ceiling, as he murmured, "I can smell that Juneau boat yet, let's take the steamcars south."

And presently began Matt's whistling, which hadn't been heard for days.

THE partners approached Ardiente, the last lap by stage on the fifth midday thereafter.

"We won't need to give down any fact—as to why we've come," said Clem.

Matt agreed that it would be well to break it easy, about letting on that gold was in their heads and that Hassayampa had put it there. At the edge of the desert and the mountains, the town was lodged sure enough; and Matt, squinting-eyed, studied the lay-out of the settlement from the stage top, pointing out the blue-green fumes from the Smelter stack.

They stepped down in the blinding glare, elbows touching. Down the street were the ruins of an old mission, and across before their eyes, two vague yet aggressive signs:

MORT VICKER'S

Real Estate and Undertaking Establishment,

and next door,

THE PILL-BOX BAR AND HOTEL

J. DUDLEY, Proprietor.

Toward the latter Clem and Matt darted in unison.

All through the forenoon the desert edges had shown a bit fiery to their unaccustomed eyes; since daybreak, in fact, they had ridden over high-lit mesas and stormy arroyos flashing white; it was restful therefore to cool their eyes in the rum-scented glooms. Deep quiet was the order of the Pill-Box, until the day shift was relieved from the Smelter. Soon after that the partners escaped to their room upstairs, not having mentioned their mission. Next morning they had the Pill-Box to themselves again except for little K. C., the bartender, and Clem felt the hour had come. He chuckled and innocently remarked—

"Come to think of it—it was down this way somewhere, wasn't it—that feller spoke of?"

"Lemme see," said Matt. "It was in California—Southern California—sure it was!"

"And what was it he called himself—a sure uncommon name—Harris—Hanson—"

They felt their teamwork getting down to a fine point.

"Hassa—Hassa—"

"You've got it, Matt—Hassayampa!"

Little K. C. spun around.

"I drinks when urged!" said Matt.

"Gold, mister, that's my business," slowly from Clem.

K. C. put down the glass he was polishing. He moved out from behind, crossed the barroom and bent between them, his hands upon the red-topped table. The partners' eyes held him in mild surprize—a gray-headed man, no stranger to life's griefs. K. C. had mournful eyeballs and kept up a rapid winking as if to press out tears.

"Did I hear you rightly say you met up with that old buzzard in Seattle?" he asked at last.

"We were speaking of one Hassayampa," Matt said austerely.

"Did he borrow money from you?"

"Not as I recall—did he, Clem?"

"Not memorable."

"His clock couldn't have been running—"

They had started something. Mr. Dudley himself was first to appear. Then the front door of the Pill-Box began to open and shut rapidly, as if the mention of Hassayampa had broken an enchantment. The gathering townsmen appeared flighty and high-strung, the Pill-Box like a chicken yard with a hawk sailing over.

From a whole lot of mixed conversation in the next two hours, the partners drew that ten years before, driving two burros packed with incredibly rich ore, Hassayamapa had come piping into town. He left again next morning, saying he would get his own claim properly staked and then let the "boys" in on the bonanza. The news spread and miners crowded in from afar, having scented a new El Dorado. The whole town was chafed raw with expectation two months later, when Hassayampa came limping in with empty riggin's, saying he hadn't been able to find the lode a second time.

Again and again he was bountifully staked, but never brought back another

ounce of that same quartz, and finally when trusted with a last grub-pile by Mort Vickers, the undertaker, the old man headed out into the desert with his burros instead of back toward the mountains. He had either gone mad from too much punishment, or else he was leading a double life too utterly dark for Ardiente's morals.

"I have always held to it," little K. C. mourned, pressing his eyelids tightly together, "that there ain't any Lost Lode—that Hassayampa found another man's cache or held up some Mexican pack-train. This burg will learn to believe what I say some day."

The town was still touchy on the whole subject. Matt and Clem, in spite of their craft and secrecy, were labeled as two more fools come to look for the Lost Lode.

"You'll be needin' a couple of burros if you two go up into the Holy Water to look for Hassayampa's treasure," said Mr. Dudley himself, during the busier part of an evening.

"We've been thinkin' of that," said Clem.

"Now I've got a couple of good burros that I'm not usin' hefty, and I'll let em' go at the right price. Their names are Cyrus and Ida. Makes it easy in speakin' of 'em at once—"

"How's that?" Matt asked.

"Cy-an-ide," and there was a cackle from obscure corners of the Pill-Box Bar.

The partners drew aside. "Let's not get mad," Clem said. "A fellow always has to pay for what he don't know. 'Member how we had to pay for that in Alaska?"

"When was it we got to knowin' anything about Alaska?" Matt asked.

"We didn't begin right up there," Clem said, thinking of the cabin on the Sad Sermon.

Matt was still peeved.

"Call this beginnin' right—bein' kidded back and forth by a lot of inmates of the Whittle and Sit Sanitarium?"

"They're tender from bein' stung about Hassayampa's Lost Lode. We'll be out of here in a day or two. Take it easy, Mat."

THE partners would have preferred to wrangle it out alone with the burros, but though it was only four-thirty in the morning, a delegation was up to help them pack.

"The whole town knows by this time that we couldn't throw the diamond hitch," Matt grumbled. "No secret we ain't hard-rock men."

"Sure a bad place for secretions—Ardiente is," said Clem.

They began to feel better as they climbed. Their eyes turned up into the morning glare above the parent range. The air was sterile, dry but rich with vague promise. Clem felt as he had never felt on the Monongahela, nor up in the Cold Shoulder—as if he had come to his own country. Here was thin keen sparkling air full of heat that dried the mould out of a man's bones and all hangover chills from a man's blood. Lost Lode, Ramshorn Bench, the Holy Water and Tuerta Canyons, Yellow Lily Springs—names that had something of the same effect upon him as the sound of church bells had on Matt.

"Clem," the other said brokenly, "I'm sure sorry I lost my temper back there. It's my weakness. It's what kept me out of the ministry—"

Clem suffered from embarrassment. Matt's temper was quite as easy for him to do with as this, but their first feel of high country made all else of no account that day. Clem's eyes held a wisp of white cloud that hovered over the nearer peaks.

"Matt," he said with rare fervor, "there's gold up there! And to think that the richest lode in the world might show up in an outcropping not more than a foot square! Yes, sir, Matt, there's gold up there in the Big Smokies."

And that became their name for the whole of the high country around Ardiente. On the way up they found traces of other prospectors who had searched for Hassayampa's Lost Lode; old camps, bunks built out of logs with great labor, raised high from the ground.

"Fear of snakes," said Matt.

At one camping place they found a strip of old mill-belting and a piece cut from it the size of the sole of a man's shoe; and another time, carefully cached under a stone, Matt pulled out a leather-bound volume.

"Somebody searching for Hassayampa's gold with a hymn book!" he exclaimed, opening the pages.

Clem turned drearily away. More fuel to feed Matt's pious glooms. He hadn't forgotten the Sabbath school papers, nor the Bronson Munn Easter painting of the Sad Sermon days.

Through dim cañons, across the silent

benches and flats of big timber; words always less frequent as altitude increased. Long days dragged to the crack of hammer and the tinkle of picks—always turning over the rocks, pecking at the sun-baked slopes like birds grubbing at a wrinkled hide, and always as the mysteries of the solitude closed about them, they met the old enemy of the Yukon cabin, gradually becoming utterly deranged in relationship.

Back in Ardiente all was changed. Contrasted with the common run of men, each saw rare values and felt a deep need of the other.

Once in an old tomato-can, the tin turning to paper, they found a bit of writing—some miner taking the trouble to vent his exasperated soul on the "ornery" nature of Hassayampa. It was at a time of one of their bad spells, but the partners felt better after reading. It relieved them for a day, at least. That Hassayampa was the curse of their lives and the jinx of the age, was subject for endless talk. In this they were true townsmen of Ardiente.

Gradually they came to be known as unlucky men; addicts who couldn't get away from the Lost Lode; harder and harder to get a grub-stake, except through serving time at the Smelter—dark days of dinner-pail under a foreman's eyes. Matt felt it wasn't fair to Clem, and Clem couldn't bear to see Matt lowering himself in labor. But there was a value about the town periods that neither appreciated enough, since the old curse never settled upon them in the midst of other men.

Less and less they wasted money, using "the hotel" when in town, camping in the open, instead; sometimes on the mountain side of Ardiente, sometimes desert-ward. It was the smell of the Smelter they tried to escape, but the fumes sooner or later searched them out. Always at the end of their working days they would commune on the place they would go next—some ridge, some divide, some valley they had seen but hadn't pecked yet, locating the exact spot. The best times of all were the first days of each fresh setting-out, before "cabin" fever found them—turning their backs on the settlement, all indignities forgotten, stars above, flint underfoot, gleam of gold ahead.

Hard-rock men, they became in real truth, gold rock, at that. Neither would have crossed an arroyo for platinum or silver, except as a means to keep on hunting for gold. Matt has heavier by this time and a trifle loose-kneed from following the ambling pack-animals over uneven trails. His prophecy had come true about Clem—only a few valiant hairs now crossed the timber line of the tight hat band.

Finally toward the end of a two months' prospecting trip, the personal strain became so great that they had separate camps, each cooking his own coffee apart. Down they went into Ardiente, grub-sacks empty, picks blunted, hammer-handles broken or badly checked, vowing to "go different ways for good" when they reached town. At widely separated red-topped tables in the Pill-Box, they took their seats and no word passed between them for several days.

ABOUT this time Mort Vickers of the real estate and untertaking establishment, had a vivid and arousing dream, that Hassayampa's Lost Lode was hidden away under a recent slide up at the head of Tuerta Canyon. Prospectors were few in Ardiente at this late day, but Mr. Vickers observed that Clem Daniels and Matt Stobart persisted in sitting apart in the Pill-Box. He disliked the idea of staking two men, but the thought came that he might take advantage of the estrangement of the partners.

He sat down at Clem's table.

"Clem," he whispered, "I believes in you—"

The sun-blackened wraith in the black felt hat gloomily shook his head.

"I believes in you, and do you know what else I believes, Clem?"

"Can't say that I do."

"I believe you ought to try a trip alone."

A forlorn look came into Clem's eyes. He had just been trying to get up strength to turn his back on Matt Stobart, Ardiente and the Big Smokies for all time. The squat undertaker before him wasn't pleasant to his eyes. Mort had equipped and sent forth prospectors before this, with their possible discoveries mortgaged. Regardless of what it said in the lexicon, the word "mortgaged" meant death-grip to Mr. Vickers, and Clem wasn't forgetting the point.

"What's your recent idea?" he asked.

Mr. Vickers whispered that he was willing to risk one more stake for one man.

"I ain't just ready to take out a single grub-stake right now, Mort," said Clem, though he didn't see more than three or

four square meals ahead, before applying for work at the Smelter.

Mort moved away and presently sat down at a distant table.

"Matt," he whispered. "You know I believes in you, and thinks I, last night, scannin' it over, 'Matt needs to go out into the mountains alone.'. How soon do you plan to get shed of Ardiente again?"

A frozen look came into Matt's eyes.

"Alone?"

"Now that was the way it came to me, Matt. No man can keep his mind on eatin' his own grub and give proper attention to minrul signs, so I've decided to fix up a stake for you once more, to comb certain top ridges at the headwater of the Tuerta—"

"Alone, did you say?"

Mr. Vickers tried variously for two days but from each table he met an unyielding force on this point of a one-man stake. The longer Matt and Clem stayed apart of their own will, the more dangerous it became for an outsider to suggest that either hit the trail alone. Mr. Vickers' dream haunted him to the point at last of suggesting a double-stake, and the speed and force with which he was taken up gave him one of the starts of his life.

"I'm figuring that you two will bring home the horn of plenty this expedition," Mort said finally. "In fact, if you two don't find yellow seed-beds, I've shore made up my mind to stop grub-stakin' gents for good."

On the dawn chosen for departure, three "half-mules" were being packed in the Pill-Box chicken yard, when Mort Vickers came in through the lattice-gate with a small stone jug in his hand—a checkered jug of green and red with a ribbon and seal.

"Frumentum," he called, raising the vessel. "Frumentum, as the drug-store feller says. A quart of the same stuff I cured my cough with, when I comes out here dyin' from Cincinnati, fourteen years ago. This here was ten-year med'cine then, men, and the mornin' stars'll sing together when you breaks this seal. Pure wine of the grain, I'm bringin' for you gents to pack this mornin'!"

The partners glanced at each other, each to verify his suspicion that Mort Vickers had gone *loco*.

"I'm not a drinkin' man," said Matt, "but med'cine—"

"On what terms do we break this seal, did I hear you say?" asked Clem.

"That's the purtiest part, Clem," Mort said, ignoring the other. "You breaks this seal on the night you find gold—and drinks with my compliments."

"I've heard that the Smokies up Tuerta way riffles with diamond-backs," Matt observed thoughtfully. "How about snake-bite havin' to do with breakin' and enterin' this little jug?"

"This ain't proper snake-bite antidote," Mr. Vickers said hastily. "This here's festive—for the findin' of the Lost Lode. Anyway, the diamond-back has a manly habit of warnin' his enemies."

It was finally covenanted between the three that the seal of the stone jug should not be broken, save in case of serious accident, until gold in pay-portion was discovered. The life of the party that trip was one of the three pack-animals, Dappled Dolly of troubled soul. She would fall over a bank to attract attention. She rambled nights and had to be sent for. Clem and Matt took turns hunting her in the morning, and often it was an hour's job before the real work of the day began. They tried staking her out nights, but Dolly couldn't get her nourishmen on a picket-line, so one or the other had to spend an hour or more hunting foliage that any normal beast would have been free to find for herself. It became utterly unthinkable to pack a checkered jug of refined music on withers reckless as Dolly's.

"She ain't a jack, she ain't," Matt said at last. "She's a female Hassayampa—"

Even so, the first days of this trip were among the best the partners ever spent together. Prolonged estrangement below had given them a real zest together, but up at the Tuerta headwaters the magic fell away and each began to find in the other that demon which called out his worst.

Six weeks and no sign of pay streak. They were gold-sour. Incidentally the checkered stone jug was worn smooth and gleaming against wood and canvas rigging and bare burro hide, having ground sore places over the entire packing surface of the two self-respecting beasts. Continually it rocked loose and threatened to break against the crags. Clem hadn't packed a mirror, but the conviction grew upon him that he was getting slant-eyed from watching that jug ooze up out of the packs. The seal stayed close guarded, however, tight as a ballot-box; the covenant held fast.

THEY had pushed on away up to High Spring among the lodgepoles—that meant an altitude of nine thousand feet. Only enough food was left to see them back into Ardiente. The long twilight had begun, but afternoon was still on the ridges. Clem came in bringing a huge armful of forage for Dolly, still not trusted to roam. It had come to the worst again. Something was bound to happen when things got bad as this. He caught the smell of Matt's separate coffee-pot and there came with it a sense of deep disgrace, far worse than the thought of meeting Mort Vickers with no gold to report.

Clem's eye roved to the packs and the checkered jug. He wasn't hungry as usual; he didn't even feel attracted to coffee tonight. He bent over the stream to wash and his feet crunched on a mat of dry trash flung there in high water. A sudden hissing rustle of leaves or seed-pods underfoot gave him a start, and at the same instant he felt a stab in the thumb—most realistic, in spite of the sharp blades of a little Yucca plant growing out from the rocks. That was a moment of inspiration. Why not give Matt something real to worry about? He chuckled. Then he chuckled again.

"That diamond-back sure forgot himself that time," he muttered aloud, holding up his thumb.

From the side of his eye he saw Matt straightening up from his fire, his shoulders veer around. Out from a face incognito with whiskers jerked the two words:

"What's that?"

"Frumentum, mister," Clem coldly said. "Open her up."

Matt was running toward him, the demon already cast out. "You ain't gone and got bit with a snake, Clem?"

"Wine of the grain—get out the little jug."

"But Clem, where is it? Lem'me bleed you first. Let me cut them pricks open."

"Don't bother, Matt, just get the antidote."

Matt galloped off, lifting his feet high as if striding over big stones. He returned with the checkered jug and a towel for tourniquet. "But Clem, I've got to help you first! Let me take a turn and hog-tie around your arm—"

"Never mind local treatments, Matt—open up the internal. I'm waitin' to hear them mornin' stars Mort Vickers spoke of—"

Matt broke the seal and tremblingly poured four gurgles into the tin cup. The bouquet came up to him; an agony of loneliness with it—the long down-trail to Ardiente alone—

Just then his coffee-pot boiled over back on the little fire.

"Leave 'er be, Matt," Clem ordered from behind his tin cup. "Bring your cup. No need of you stainin' yourself with coffee tonight."

"Don't think of me, Clem. There ain't too much as it is!"

"Sure there is. Just pour yourself out some and don't worry—"

The harrowing face that turned up to him, touched Clem's heart with deep warmth.

"Lem'me see your hand," Matt broke in. "I sure shouldn't have let them minutes go by and not opened it up to bleed—"

"I'm leavin' it all to this eyntment—"

"I always knew you were game, Clem," the other mourned. "I always knew you'd go out laughin'. Do you s'pose you could forgive—?"

"Now, Matt, let all that go," the other said nervously. "I'm not passin' out tonight, and I don't feel like antidotin' further alone."

"I'll just dreen out a little drink to please you!"

Dusk was stealing in.

From Clem:

"I'm awed—actually awed at Mort Vicker's judgment of med'cine—"

From Matt:

"It's smooth—smooth as kerosene. And don't the wind blow soft and cool?"

Now Dolly began her night's marauding.

"That man-eatin' mother-shark," Clem observed, as they heard the ring of the picket-pin yanked out of the stiff gravel.

"There, there, partner," Matt said. "Poor little Dolly—she ain't been proper understood. Are you sure you ain't swellin' up none?"

"Sure Matt. Nothin' the matter with my thumb. See me roll a cigaret same as usual? What do you say to us cookin' up some pancakes and openin' that last can of Bartlett pears? I don't feel near so disinclined to nourishment as I did a while back—"

"I'll just do that," said Matt. "But what puzzles me is that there could be a

di'mond-back in this latitude. Never heard the like—"

"Maybe they don't come so poisonous 'way up this high," said Clem.

On the third morning afterward they crossed the Tuerta Fork and turned down into the Holy Water with only three miles to go. The partners were gloom-struck. Ardiente to face broke and Mort Vickers, with no tale of gold to tell; but on the whole the mood of return was less black than usual, as they trudged after Dappled Dolly, her packs light but large. The other two jacks straggled behind in empty packing trees.

The trail on the ravine-side was narrow and neglected. Dolly essayed to take a curve at a mincing trot, banged her packs against an exposed cedar root, lost her ever-precarious balance. Overside the big bundle, with a small burro showing lively, rolled down to the creek-bed.

"I sure prays she kills herself," Matt whispered, "I sure do, but she won't lose a hair!"

Dolly was lodged in shallow water, twenty-five feet down between two big stones, four brown spindle legs upside and racing in thin air. Clem was first to the creek-bed. The knots were underneath, so he drew his knife and slid the blade through the key-rope. Then he placed a firm hand under Dolly's crest, and she squirmed loose, altogether pleased and joyous with her unrigged self.

Clem dragged out the wet packs. A gallon lard pail had been broken in and a remarkable area of various surfaces had been smeared, considering the little lard that had been left in the pail. Matt sprawled on the slope of the ravine a little higher up, showing no interest in the accident. His voice sounded presently:

"Looks like our Dolly put old Ardiente back on the map this mornin'!"

"How's that, Matt?"

"Nicest run of zinc blend, I ever looked at. See where Doll fractured this ore goin' down? Ever see the like?"

"Zinc," said Clem, setting down the lard pail. "Zinc ain't gold—"

"And we're hard rock men or nothin'!" said Matt.

"Suppose if we'd been lookin' for zinc we might have found gold!"

Matt sank back against the bank. "If we ever get so low as to mine for this stuff, we've sure got the mineral to work on. Funny after all the years. What'll we call this dump—the Dolly?" he chuckled.

"I don't know's I care to cherish the memory of that cockroach the rest of my days," said Clem. "Zinc," he added spitefully, "I can smell the fumes of the Smelter right now." He kicked the lard pail down into the stream. "Let's call this here the Lard Pail and forget her."

IV

THEY were back at the Smelter in Ardiente, heads bowed. Silently, calmly, they worked, with an economy of motion that the foreman didn't approve of.

"Hurry up, you men," he called. "What do you think this is—some lock-step?"

The foreman had only recently been raised from hard labor and the whole Smelter was hot and heavy on his shoulders. A new furnace was being installed. The excavation work was finished, the cement matrix being set in. A gang of men, including Clem and Matt, were carrying timber down an incline. The foreman went on to remark that the purpose of labor was to move as many scantlings as possible from box car to excavation.

"Hey, you, gran'-pop—"

Clem was first to catch the point that the foreman was now looking at Matt.

"Hey, you rubber-knees—"

Now Matt was getting it. Half-way between the box car and the excavation, at the edge of which the foreman stood, he placed his timber down.

"Yes, you, I mean you—" that being the last the foreman said for some days, other than thickly.

Matt finished the last seven or eight feet between him and his prey in a tigerish leap; both went over the edge into the pit.

Clem started to pull his partner off, but others of the gang were inclined to help the foreman; so Clem found himself plentifully occupied with outsiders until Matt had finished. About this time Ernie Runyon, the young superintendent of the Smelter appeared. He used words sparingly, but did a lot of laughing. He said it wasn't necessary, but the partners insisted on being paid off at once. Otherwise empty-handed, they started walking toward the sky-line of the Big Smokies once more.

"Matt," said Clem. "You're in danger of gettin' quick-tempered."

No answer. Clem communed with himself as they walked, that young Runyon had sure acted fair and kindly, and that it was the word "rubber-knees" that had done it. He hoped he would never spring anything of the sort in his sleep.

"I s'pose we *are* gettin' old," Matt said at last, looking into Clem's eyes with a sudden harrowing hope that he would instantly deny such a wild idea.

"I wouldn't go so far as to say that, Matt—not that so much, as we're gettin' a bit set in our ways."

The other nodded.

"From bein' so much alone," Clem added.

"We can't get alone any too soon to suit me," said Matt, who hadn't yet begun to repent.

But Clem remembered what always happened in the solitudes.

"I feel like that, too—a bit ruffled by society, but we can't make for the Smokies half-cocked like this—Ernie will take us back—"

THEY tried the mountains once more, months afterward, but that was the finish for an indefinite time. They split their outfits in high country, and came down into Ardiente by different trails, unable to forget what had happened. Neither expected as much, but the patience of Ernie Runyon didn't appear to be exhausted. On the contrary, he seemed still to be laughing a little over Matt's clean-up on the site of the new furnace, and set the partners to work on different shifts. Matt made his camp on the mountain side of the town; Clem lingered at the Pill-Box for a few days and then spread his blankets on the desert edge.

One night the burned-out smell from the Smelter was strong in the air. It spoiled the taste of coffee and tobacco for Clem; it made him think of the blast mill on the Monongahela. Nothing to go back East to; nothing to go up into the Smokies for—not alone, at least. Strange, but the idea of gold didn't seem to work—alone. Matt's fire shone up the canyon beyond the town. Matt wasn't making any lightning strokes to the Copper Country—

Clem's head bowed over his fire. A lonely smile came to his lips, a show-down smile. Compromise was in his brain; the resort of a man of many failures. Long he struggled with himself. A few days later the shifts were juggled at the Smelter, and the partners found themselves working side by side at the drift-face. Slowly Clem fanned up his nerve to speak.

Ernie Runyon came through Saturday afternoon and began kidding between them about it being the time of year to take out a gold-hunter's license. Matt answered that a man was apt to get cracked as Hassayampa over seeking and not finding for too long. That broke the ice and Clem only waited for the superintendent to leave, before bending to say—

"Mebbe if we turned over the Lard Pail for a spell, Matt—"

An old man came to life before his eyes. It was the round-faced youth again, on the banks of the big river.

"——, Clem, it was just on my lips to speak! And we'll let young Runyon in. He's a mining engineer and he's sure been decent to us. He'll know—"

They took the superintendent up into the Holy Water the next morning, it being Sunday. Ernie stayed all day, and ate his lunch standing up. At nightfall as they started down, he told the partners they had something. At the edge of town in full darkness, he added that the stuff could be gotten out, meaning to the Smelter without damaging expense. Thus, one by one, after deep deliberations, point on point, the young engineer came through with decisions of value and permanence; finally that he hadn't been entirely pleased with his work at the Smelter, and had formed the idea of gambling with his future, taking the Lard Pail for better or worse.

The good feeling of the partners was in getting together, not over the promise of a zinc mine. They never could have put that through alone; some deadly stiff borrowing to do in the early days of the Lard Pail, but Runyon worked that end too. The mine righted itself, even in spite of usury. Matt and Clem squared up old accounts and relished their new standing in Ardiente, but were secretly ashamed at the price they paid for plenty. They were actually delicate about hiring new hands; it seemed an indignity to ask any man to work for such common stuff as zinc, but young Runyon was back of all departments. Caught in the mesh of income affairs, the partners watched him with awe, with a kind of fathering

timidity and affection. They drew apart and discussed the things he did, finding them good.

"He's sure throwin' himself into the Lard Pail," said Clem.

"Do you think he knows what he's doin'?" said Matt.

Cautiously they raised his pay—which Ernie also took standing up. The two established camp outside of town in the wide portal of Holy Water Canyon, where they could look up toward the Lard Pail and down over the town and beyond to the desert. They cooked their own beans and flap-jacks and coffee as before, but from morning till night, tried to prove to all concerned that they were necessary around the mine. As a matter of fact, they had to stop and think they were owners, and never could be quite sure but that Ernie Runyon might discover the secret of their half-heartedness.

"Every time I see him comin' at me fast like that," said Matt, "I get the feelin' I'm going to be laid off."

Once the blacksmith was off duty with pork-indigestion. Clem turned the steel under the stroke that day, while Matt slung the sledge.

"These fellows need us to set the pace," he panted. "It's sure great, Clem to work hard like we do."

But each had a painful private wish to be following the drag of a burro pair up into the Big Smokies or even across the mellow reaches of sage. A lock this time, however; neither could forget. Monotony in the midst of other men was bad enough, but each had a deeper fear of finding himself alone with the other, and the old mania settling between.

Even so they had a way of torturing themselves with talk. One spring night when the sharpness was out of the air and a young moon was in the sky before complete darkness, Clem rolled himself a small brown twist and Matt sat by with a bag of peppermint drops in his hand.

"You remember when we saw that bald-headed eagle flying low over the ridge just above Blue Jay Meadows?" he asked.

"Sure," said Clem.

"'Member how she looked up in the bright sun—how you could almost see through her?"

"Yep, she looked like thin gold—"

A little breeze came down the canyon from the west. A high-pitched yell of a coyote sounded from the distance and back of them a bird answered, as if it was her business.

"Do you 'member that draw that smelled like brimstone, after we started a slide?"

Clem's eyes smarted as from Smelter fumes.

"And the fat black bear, and the little water fall that kept running clear into August?"

"You might hush up that foolish talk, Matt, and let a man listen to who's a-comin' up the trail from town—"

"I don't give a hang who's a-comin'. I'm gettin' pretty tired of this danged Lard Pail."

"We might drive over into Wrendon and cool the soles of our feet on a brass rail—"

"You know, Clem Daniels, I'm not a drinkin' man!"

From afar came high-pitched tones designed to infuse life into a lagging burro. Finally a hail—

"Hello, is that the Lard Pail?"

"An outpost of her," Clem answered. "You're on your way—"

"Which way's the Holy Water?"

"We're sittin' on her," Clem called. "Guess you can have a dipperful—"

They heard the word "cantelope."

"You don't s'pose he's bringin' any fresh fruit?" said Matt.

The tones they heard had a quarrelsome ring, plenty venom in the "gits" and "huts."

"Bittergent," said Clem.

"I've got it, now," Matt chuckled. "Cant'lope's his jackass."

THEY moved out to meet the shadowy figure—a bent wisp of a man coming up the trail.

"I didn't stop none in town—came straight out here—" a voice out of the past, misted over by years.

"It ain't—tain't Hassayampa!"

Then they had him between them. Incredibly short, he seemed, and presently in the light of the fire, the partners looked into his face, a wrinkled mass of age in which eyes burned fiercely—altogether unsubdued. They handed him a dipper, and Hassayampa cooled the inside of his neck, Clem's eyes fascinated for a second by the Adam's apple nodding. The box they shoved toward him to sit on was scorned, Hassayampa squatting on his heels.

"Heerd you was makin' tin-ware," he said.

The partners bowed in silence. They deserved reproof. Hassayampa went on—

"I don't know whether there's any life left in you boys, from what I can hear, but I thought I'd give you another chance—"

His eyes were burning like a hawk's—pale amber on the outside, red sparks underneath. They didn't dare to glance at each other. A mighty thrill had taken them over. Each thought Hassayampa had come back to look for the Lost Lode and meant to let them in; perhaps he knew all the time and could lead them straight to it. He hadn't even stopped in town for a drink of water.

"Ever hear of the Calsos?" he asked.

They shook their heads.

"I'm goin' down there. Thought I'd give you boys a chance to go along."

"Another gold rush?"

"Rush? It's a mighty secret, I'm tellin' you, yet. Inside info-mation. Government timber cruiser let me in—"

"What's the matter with goin' up into the Tuerta?" Matt asked. "We didn't forget to look around for the Lost Lode, when we was prospectin' up there."

For an instant there was a look in Hassayampa's eyes like a banging shutter—a loose look, but it tightened instantly.

"Lookin' for a tin mine—that's about the size of what you two been lookin' fur, but I'm goin' to give you one more chance. Haven't got time to go up in the Tuerta right now. We're goin' down into Mexico, on the Calsos."

Clem said cautiously—

"Sure, we'll fix you up for a stake, Hassayampa."

Matt's voice broke in—

"Grub-stake for three is what we're fixin'."

"How soon do you think we could start?" the old man demanded, not looking at Clem.

"Ten days or two weeks," Matt nervously began, "we ought to be able—"

Hassayampa snorted. "All we're needin' is an order from the grocery down in Ardiente. I'm figurin' on leavin' to-morror."

Clem let them have it out. He rose from the fire and drew apart. As he staked out Cant'lope for the night, he saw that Matt was frying bacon for the old man, and from the distance he heard Matt's fervent questions about the Calsos. Clem was vaguely troubled and didn't hurry back to the supper-fire. In fact, Matt joined him in the dark after a time, whispering—

"He's sure ra'rin' to go, and it looks like the way out for us."

"I'd rather go up into the Smokies," said Clem slowly.

"So'd I, but you know what always happens between us. Mebbe we ain't ready for the Smokies."

"It's been a long time since we tried it, Matt. Maybe we are ready by now."

"If we ain't this Mexican dee-tour is what's going to make us ready."

"Of course, it's all right with me, if you're set on going," said Clem, but just then in the silence, he had a sudden cold feeling of coming back from the Calsos alone.

HASSAYAMPA had turned in, saying he wanted to be ready for an early start. The partners were a long time getting to their blankets that night. They sat with their arms around their knees until the fire was black. A persistent panorama played before Clem's mind. Mexico didn't call him, nor any unheard-of Mexican river. He heard waterfalls calling. He saw the eagle's flight. He saw the yellow lilies bending down over dim streams in the nameless gorges of the Smokies—all in a flash. Moreover, he would have seen all this clearer still if it hadn't been for Hassayampa's snores off-side.

"He seems a trifle childish," whispered Clem. "Looks as if nature has drawed a curtain over part of his knowledges. Think of what he must of suffered, losin' that lode after findin' it. It's my idea we'd better do the right thing by Hassayampa and at the same time stand firm—"

"Stand firm—how's that, Clem?"

"Not follow his lead a second time. Let him go alone down into the Calso-mines if he wants."

"Followin' his lead brought us the Lard Pail, didn't it—more money than we know what to do with?"

Clem smiled into the dark that Matt could forget the tough years in which they had hunted for the Lost Lode, and now Hassayampa coming back, ignoring that there was such a lode.

"Why, if he'd given us thirteen thousand dollars that night in the Fashion Bar in Seattle," Clem added musingly, "he couldn't have overhauled us down here tonight with more spunk. Instead of giving us

anything that night, he gave us a wrong steer that cost us years and never did bring in nothin'."

"'Bring in nothin'!" Matt repeated. "Say, we're getting to sound like Mort Vickers with his mortgages—'bring in nothin'!' Didn't we have all them trips up into the Smokies?"

"Oh, I guess we're headin' south all right. I'm just as anxious as you are to get shed of Ardiente and the Lard Pail."

Clem halted with a jerk. The same feeling he had known a while back as he walked apart came over him again—as if he were on the way back from the Calsos alone.

"After all, there's sure to be gold down there. Them government timber cruisers know a lot," said Matt.

"Gold is where you find it," said Clem.

HASSAYAMPA was showing up mean to manage in different ways. When Matt and Clem respectfully told him the difficulties in the way of starting off on the minute, he made scornful remarks on how a whole lot of money softens down a man. When Clem insisted that they would have to do the main part of the journey by rail and actually travel east to El Paso before beginning to "drop south" a scream was raised.

"That timber cruiser said there was gold down in the Calsos and he said it had a green rock matrix, but he didn't say to go to Noor'leens first."

Another difficulty was that Hassayampa refused to hear of any trip for gold being taken without Cant'lope.

"He thinks he's liable to run against a jack down there that can't understand English," said Matt.

The partners had to intrigue even to get a minute alone with young Runyon, who didn't favor the journey

"That's jungle country," Ernie said, "semi-tropical—a thousand miles south of here at least."

They saw Hassayampa turtling up.

"I don't want to put ice-packs on any vacation ideas." Ernie added quickly in lowered tones. "But I wouldn't put too much stock in the old man. All the straight goods he ever had in his brain-pan have been baked hard long ago."

"What you boys runnin' off for when we've got so much to do?" Hassayampa wanted to know. "And don't you two put any trust in what any young feller says. Of all the fool ideas about minin', them college people has 'em!"

Questions like these popped at the partners as they walked away with Hassayampa between them:

"You two are the owners, ain't you? You don't need to ask leave to go, do you? It's your tin-horn factory, ain't it?"

Work at the Lard Pail was practically suspended for the last day or two in getting the outfit off to the railroad. Cant'lope himself, in spite of a reputation for willingness to go anywhere, refused to walk into a crate carefully prepared for him by the men of the plant. He had to be thrown and tied before being boxed up, and this proved a keen strain to Hassayampa's temper. Both partners felt queer when Ernie Runyon took their hands at the last minute and said he would take care of things the best he could without them. His assistant brought up a heavy sack of hammers and drills, especially made and tempered and presented as a gift from the whole Lard Pail crew.

Except when Hassayampa darted forward to the baggage car for a look at Cant'lope, Matt and Clem found difficulty in getting a word together. Their spirits were kept down by the feverish haste of the old man, who felt they were missing the chance of their life at the sight of each range of mountains from the car windows.

"Look out there!" he would cry, in a voice to start up the whole coach. "I'll bet there's gold in them hills. You fellows can't tell what you're missing, skyhootin' through the country this way."

"Didn't we start out for the Calsos, Hassa?" Clem asked.

"That we did, we sure did, but I figured we'd mosey along and prospect by ourselves slow and leisurely."

SAN CRISTOBAL on the Calsos —no signs of a gold rush and the partners felt very far from home. There appeared to be but one boy in the town who could speak English, having run away "down the river" in his early youth. Apparently, what the young Mexican saw down there had killed the spirit of adventure within him. He fell asleep several times while sitting to interpret between the partners and the *alcalde* of the

village. Matt and Clem's quest for information was further broken in upon by Hassayampa, who wanted to set out at once—it didn't matter which way.

No, the *alcalde* attested, San Cristobal had heard of no gold rush. It was true that three white men had come before—yes, señors, many months before, how many months one does not remember. It might be ascertained from the members of one's family. Yes, the other white men had bought a boat and started down the river, but had not been heard of again. It was said there was another pueblo and another railroad down the river, but one did not know what to believe. Yes, the jungles were thick down country; no trails to follow other than the way of the river itself. Yes, it would doubtless be difficult for those not inured to the fevers of the district—"

The session was closed because the hour of siesta had arrived. Matt and Clem moved out into the burning sun of midday. The only signs of life in San Cristobal at this time were Hassayampa and Cant'lope, head to head, in the main street.

"No-sir-ee!" the old man yelled, learning the latest information. "You fellows rushed me through some of the richest-lookin' ore-lands I ever see, by train. If you two wants to go boat-ridin' now, hop to it, but me and Cant'lope's goin' prospectin', and not with no hook and line off the back end of a boat, neither."

Matt felt prickly hot under his flannel shirt. He took Hassayampa by the shoulders with both hands and pointed to the green wall of the jungle that showed down at the end of the street.

"Did you ever hear of gold growin' on vegetations like that? Butterflies and parakeets, yes, but we're lookin' for rocks, me and Clem are, the green rocks that timber cruiser spoke of. The *alcalde* says said rocks are down the river, if anywhere, and that a boat's the way to get there—"

"Down the river." The partners found themselves saying it over and over again, a San Cristobal habit. Everything foreign and mysterious to the town; all men and things that went away and never came back, like the other three white men, were "down the river."

"They used to say that a lot on the Yukon," Clem recalled.

"I sure remember—that time I got tails," said Matt.

THEY weren't river men.

Any adaptability they might ever have shown for life on the Calsos, had been worn out of the partners by years in the hot clean hardness of the desert and the Big Smokies. Their views of propriety were too fixed easily to become accustomed to the stir and slap of an aroused alligator on a muddy bank. An ever-widening, ever-deepening jungle drain, they found the Calsos, a steamy sort of hell where everything went on way, and that way *down*.

On account of Cant'lope they had been forced to pick out a roomy craft for the down-stream journey. It was a sort of scow, but they called it a barge. The ample displacement mattered little. Merely a matter of drifting anyway; nothing to do except to shove off when they got lodged somewhere. Sometimes they drifted head-on, or again for a whole afternoon, stern-forward with Cant'lope obstructing all views.

"He sure ought to be a scenery-lovin' fool by the time we get to them green and gold mines," said Clem.

Hassayampa had started watching for green rocks the first half-hour out of San Cristobal; his face was a kind of dry intolerable mania that deeply unsettled the partners.

"On the matter of gold-huntin', he's a mad dog," said Matt. "He's a poison mad dog."

"Sufferin's sure found and branded him for her own," said Clem. "Think of what he must have gone through them years up in the Cold Shoulder."

They passed little tributaries entirely closed over by a green canopy—endless masses of lush leaves and creepers, sullen movements in the shadows—but the Calsos itself seemed hardly speeded up by these accretions. It had its own sullen movement, its endless business of *down*.

"I guess that timber cruiser must have turned to the wall and died, after tellin' Hassayampa about this river," Clem said once, after a forenoon's silence.

The old man grew heavier and heavier on their nerves like the jungle itself. The masses of twining undergrowths on the bank were like the processes of his brain. All their own ways together were broken in upon. His face was before them like a wedge of foreign matter, whenever they

looked for each other; his teetering step at their sides, his voice in their ears when either waited for the other's words. There were times when Clem found himself in a sweating tension, listening for Matt's whistle which came very rarely these days and even then was drowned out by the old man's tones.

"If I was a regular prayin' man," whispered Matt, as he prepared one evening meal, "I'd pray to be delivered of Hassayampa. I wouldn't pray for him to be taken by an alligator, I wouldn't pray for him to be folded in by a serpent, I'd only pray to be delivered—" the whisper went on and on devoutly.

"I never did fall to prayin' much," said Clem.

Just at this time at the other end of the barge, Hassayampa had taken it into his head to wash. Never was he less dear to the partners than when engaged in ablutions, his unbent back hanging over the stream as if he were about to gather it to his stiff breast, his hook-like hands crackling together over the river water. It was the deadly familiarity of every movement and manner that wore deep into the partners.

"He sure makes me feel like heavin' the fry-pan his way, then the coffee pot, then the kitchen stove," Matt whispered, and added in a loud tone, "Supper's ready!"

"Huh, huh, thank'e, Mr. Stobart—" a form of coolness Hassayampa used, when he felt the partners having a word without him.

The river floated by. It was all foreign and insane to their eyes. A dirty crust of log that seemed to be floating with great labor, water-logged to the point of sinking, would suddenly uncork a spasm—a movement like the flick of a minnow's tail, leaving Matt and Clem with gray cheeks and fallen jaws. It wasn't their country. It wasn't anything like their country.

Matt's resistance was breaking down. Hatred for the old man had begun to turn in and poison him. Just the sight of Hassayampa's elbow was enough, the tone of his voice—any tone. Besides, he was getting cold and hot with curious frequency. There was a dirty taste in his mouth and a thirst—the tepid river water couldn't break the crust of it. He knew a feverish gnawing for food—until he got it in his hands, and then the impulse to throw it away. An unpleasant scent of death and darkness clung around his nostrils night and day. Gold? A clean thing like gold had never been found in a jungle like this.

A CREEPY, dripping dawn stole in along the river. Matt had lain vaguely awake for hours. Part of the time he had been trying to get it straight that he and Clem were income men, or was it part of the dream that the Lard Pail was a hard cash fact? Every little while Matt kept saying to himself that he must get up, because Clem finding him in his blankets in daylight would know something was wrong. Matt worked so hard with himself that for a time in a half-dream, he actually thought he was up and about. Then he came-to again, and began wondering why Clem wasn't around as usual. This brought him to his knees, and he saw his partner still under cover—old Clem who never let sunlight find him other than upstanding. He touched Clem's shoulder and the other jerked away, like a man who had been fighting a dream.

Matt sat back and understood. The idea slowly fixed itself that Clem had it, too; that for days he had been waited upon by a man possibly as sick as himself. Sure enough, Clem began to thresh himself awake, muttering about having the "curiousest" dream. Matt smiled at him humoringly.

HASSAYAMPA was leaping up and down. The jungle had thinned and changed. There were rocks on the shore and hills in the distance—the old man's tones in the air:

"Green rock, boys! It's gold country we're comin' to—green rock with gold coins stuck in it!"

Matt settled back in his dream.

Gold? They had heard tell of such a thing. They had wanted gold very much one time—like a couple of kids wanting a rocking horse. But kids grow up; kiddish things put away. Hassayampa, hopping here and there—off the scow and on to the bank—couldn't have grown up. Matt, trying not to drag his legs, went over and sat beside Clem. They watched Hassayampa like new arrivals in hell might watch their fiend-in-charge.

The barge was tied, the old man refusing to go farther. He was leading Cant'lope ashore. He came back for hammers and

was seen putting biscuit and bacon in a cornmeal bag, then hopping away among the rocks. The partners made no move to follow ashore after treasure.

"If them green rocks have waited this long, they can wait a spell longer" said Clem.

Matt wasn't fooled. He knew how he felt himself; also he had seen Clem's hand go out and miss an object that he reached for; seen that look of a man who can't handle his liquor, but keeps trying to be natural. The old man's voice died out of their ears.

Great peace settled down.

They lay in the shadows through midday, sort of drinking in the quiet—Cant'lope gone from the stern, Hassayampa gone from all sides. The only fret they had, and each was oppressed by exactly the same, was that they ought to be getting on somewhere for the sake of the other, who was growing a little sicker, a little weaker all the time. But even that worry went out of them that afternoon. It began to be like that night in the Smokies when they really got together—the time Clem cut himself on the rattlesnake bush—moments of a lifetime.

The partners drowsed. For a while Clem's half-dream took him back to the cabin on the Sad Sermon before the day of the burns. He saw that red and blue Easter painting on the wall—the only color of the dim wintry room, except the firelight, and Matt standing before the picture wishing he could take the hand of the artist, Bronson Munn; only Clem wasn't embarrassed now by Matt's trembling tones as he had been that day. He opened his eyes and saw his partner looking at him. In one way Matt looked like an old man and in another like a boy. There was gray in his beard, but something in the eyes never younger—the boy barber from the Copper Country. Then, as if Matt had the same run of thoughts and was merely speaking aloud:

"We sure thought we was men way back there—"

Clem smiled.

"It took all the years, didn't it?" Matt went on.

Clem perfectly understood: it took all the years for them to reach today, of course.

Matt's brow clouded. He had heard something—his ears always a touch keener. Now Clem heard it himself—a faint shout. The spell was broken. It was sure dreary to be broken in upon this way. Hassayampa was coming from far off, hopping up and down on the rocks, shouting and waving his arms. Hard to be brought back to the clammy earth and the Mexican river again. They caught the burden of the old man's yell—gold he was shouting about—gold!

The partners looked at each other, then smiled under the din. Once they had been out of their heads over that stuff. Hassayampa was waving a specimen of rock—a piece of green rock with flecks and nodules of yellow. His great hands were twisting and writhing obscenely about it.

"Whole lode of it!" he yelled "She'll bring two thousand to the ton!"

They looked from his hands to his eyes. He was clear gone from his ecstasy—clear gone and out—they saw that.

"Where is it?" they asked.

The answer was a startling change from exultation to foxiness and evasion:

"That's what *I* want to know!" he said, then began to laugh and crack his thighs. "That's just what I'm here to find out!" Suddenly he leapt ashore and made off again. "But I'm goin' to find her!" he shouted back.

They watched him disappear the way he had come.

"If that's what a man gets to—me for the Lard Pail," Matt said at last. "Why, he's so crooked he's beside himself!"

They didn't leave the barge that afternoon. Words were not needed; they asked no more than to be left alone. Hassayampa appeared up on the rocks in late afternoon. He seemed to be eyeing them intently. At nightfall he returned and drank coffee.

"Where's Cant'lope?" Matt asked.

"Feedin' up yonder. He's all right."

"Better put him on the barge tonight, don't you think?"

"Oh, he's all right."

They knew he was up to something, but the fever pressed down with the darkness and the partners forgot all concerns. Clem awoke in early daylight hearing a curious bubbling sound, and wondering where it came from. It was on his nerves, as if he had heard it for hours. Dreamily awake, it sounded for him again, a low bubble under his head. Then from Matt—

"I say, Clem!"

Now both men were sitting up. They pushed the vagueness of the night out of their eyes.

"Well, I'll be ——" Clem began.

They were in midstream, the barge floating down, neither Hassayampa nor Cant'-lope aboard. Clem looked to the hawser. "It hasn't slipped; it's been cut!" he announced.

Matt laughed weakly.

"It's the gold he's worrying about. He's afraid we'll get some of it!"

V

THEY moved to the bank and sat down awhile without words. Fever burned low again with the cool of morning. Vaguely they longed for another day of quiet like yesterday. All that they asked was to be let alone—that voice and face out of their lives. But a shadow gradually entered between them; neither could keep it back. It was Matt who spoke first—

"Don't s'pose we can leave him—not when he has gone crazy."

"Not bein' white men—we couldn't. I see that," said Clem.

"We might have drifted down a mile, or we might have come ten mile in the night."

"Anyway we got to go back and look for him. I'll make coffee first, though," said Clem.

The sun burned higher. They had left the barge; it was hard to keep in mind what they looked for, as they helped each other over the rocks. Clem tried to hold one small cool area to work within his brain, but he kept seeing the red of Matt's neck—no glisten of sweat on it—that dry flame, and the drunken glow back of Matt's eyes.

For a long time they would forget to call Hassayampa's name. It seemed calling back—all they didn't want. The tropical growths were so thick along the river that they had to climb to higher ground to make any progress and this made it hard to know if they had passed the place where Hassayampa had cut them loose. Finally Clem began to fight to keep his head for the sake of taking care of Matt; also he had reason to know that Matt was putting up the same fight.

As dark drew on they heard church-bells. The little supply of food they had brought from the barge was gone, eaten or lost, they did not know; but coffee was all they cared for. Clem built a fire; while Matt stretched out muttering. Far inland the sound of church-bells continued as the dark settled deeper, and the insects drew in like the sound of flames. It was a kind of calling out of eternity to Matt—that sound of bells—boyhood back again—slipping into the barber trade, when he had a chance—

"I wouldn't be surprized if the choir started singing," he muttered thickly, then lay like a log for a time, only hot. The turn of the fever came and he started shivering. Clem piled on the fire.

"If we could find Hassayampa, we'd go straight to them bells," Matt chattered as his jaw shook.

"Anyhow, we've done our best today," Clem kept saying. "We sure tried to find him today, Matt."

Next morning Clem felt his own senses slipping. He couldn't remember whether he was to go back toward the river or in-country toward the church-bells. The little trickle of coolness fled from his brain. It was as if the ice were gone from an ice-box—everything spoiling. Matt was pawing him, his touch hot, suffocatingly hot; the sun was hot, and up out of the earth and up out of the rocks the heat came.

THE bells were beating closer. It seemed to Clem as if they were directly overhead. He felt the jar of the deep tones in the air about his ears. Otherwise he had never been so comfortable in his life. The place where he lay seemed to be pressing ease and soothing into each muscle of his limbs and back. He had been tired a long time—tired all his life, but was resting at last. Even the light was restful, a dim cool light. There were voices and hands—all pressing this soothing peace into him, except the big bells when they tumbled and shook the world. They belonged to somebody else's idea of heaven, not his, but the rest was all right.

A ray of sunlight came into the place. It was like a pointer that the school teacher used to have in the country school—a yellow pointer and it settled upon another cot across the room. On this cot an old man lay—the pointer of sunlight finally resting upon his face—grizzled, shrunken, beard grayish, the skin waxen-white under the beard. Then the pointer moved away, and an utterly tired tone reached Clem from the shadowy cot:

"—three of us and only room for two in the boat. We gambled and I got tails—"

Clem had heard something like that long ago, but couldn't remember. There had been an old man screaming about gold, but this wasn't the one. Cool, soapy cloths on his face and arms and limbs, and out of the window there were big red flowers in the midst of green trees, showing above a gray wall. Strangest thing he ever saw—flowers as big as a man's head—gray wall, green trees, red flowers. Once in the dark a call came—

"I say, Clem!"

He tried to answer, but his throat was all out of practise.

"I say, Clem, ain't you listening? Just wanted to tell you—going down the river—"

It was seconds before Clem could get his voice working.

"Why sure, I'm listening, Matt," but there was no answer to that.

Really getting it straight that it was Matt on the other cot, Clem began to call, but a big cool hand pressed upon his forehead, covering his eyes, and a deep voice:

"Do not be troubled, señor. He does not hear you now—another time—"

"Who're you?" Clem inquired.

"I am the *padre* and this is the mission-church of San Clemente, my parish—" a deep voice somehow connected with the bells, a big man with a full-length black apron tucked under his chin, and the name of the town was Rosario, the voice said.

Clem's eyes roved to the low ceiling, and stony walls.

"But this ain't a church?"

"Part of the old mission, señor. This was the school room for novices very long ago."

Clem turned to the other cot. "What's the matter with him? Don't he know I'm here?"

"Not yet, señor. He is very spent from the fever."

Clem was for getting up right away and going to the other cot, but the *padre* said that there were only certain times of day when Matt was aware of what was going on, and this wasn't one of the times.

"Don't he know he's right in church?"

"Not yet—"

"He must be worse off than I am, mister."

Time proved to Clem that he was altogether out of luck about getting to Matt. Just as sure as he would doze for an hour in the day time, Matt would have his period of taking notice. Finally Clem began to remember what had happened before they were put to bed in this place. He sat up suddenly when the *padre* approached.

"But where's old Hassayampa? I don't see him. I don't hear him nowhere!"

"There was another, but he did not come with you."

"That's right. We lost him," said Clem. "We lost him, just as he found gold, but we were lookin' for him. We did out best—"

"In good time, you shall hear all that has happened."

But Clem had to hear right then, and the *padre* whispered the story: How he and Matt had first been seen by a woman gathering fagots in the hills between the town and the river; how she came running into the *pueblo*, saying that two white men, holding each other from falling, were moving to and fro among the rocks, calling upon the name of God in strange tongue—"

"It was old Hassayampa we were callin' on."

The *padre* bowed at the correction.

"—two white men, sustaining each other—one hatless under the meridian sun, and calling upon the name—of another who was lost."

"You say we were proppin' up each other and one of us didn't have his hat?" said Clem.

"Yes, señor, and that is what makes it hard for your friend to recover—not only stricken with fever that day, but his head bare to the midday sun—"

Clem covered his eyes. He was too confused to hear for some seconds; had to ask the *padre* to repeat how he and Matt had been brought into Rosario and taken care of; and how the men of the town had then hastened out to look for Hassayampa, who was not found that day, or the next.

"Though his body lived a while afterward, the soul had gone out from his eyes, when my people found him," said the *padre*, adding that a burro had been found, however, in good condition, and had since been cared for by the village.

"Old Hassayampa," Clem muttered. "I thought we'd been hearin' from him before, if—" he halted and it was a full minute before he added curiously, "But the gold he found—in the green rocks—"

"Fools' gold, señor," the *padre* said, "iron or copper pyrites. I have seen the rock."

With a glance toward Matt, Clem asked in hushed tone—

"Doesn't he know anything about all this yet?"

"No, señor."

Clem gained his feet after the *padre* left and went to the other cot. For several minutes he bent over the shrunken face. There was a waxen look under the grayish beard that looked as if the hole would stay, if you pressed your finger into it. Not much like old Matt at all.

"——," Clem's thought was, "how could I have missed seein' that he didn't have his hat on in that sun!"

Matt stayed alive, but didn't rally with the days. He seemed to know when Clem came to stand by him—face on its side, eyes open, but dull. He would smile, the face sometimes slipping down off the pillow, as he nodded. One day as Clem stood there, the big bells began to beat above and the dull gray look of a life that merely hovered, changed; living light entered the eyes again. His partner walked away, for once with a step that didn't drag.

CLEM didn't know how much he himself was changed, but his hands surprized him a lot—the black gone out of the knuckles and from under the nails. There had been weeks he didn't know anything about, the *padre* said. Gray wall, green leaves, red flowers big as a man's head—everything easy and soothing, the *padre's* voice, the girls laughing at the cistern outside, the little children drawing nearer and nearer the doorway, even the church bells—all easy and soothing, days flowing on like a river in Rosario.

Clem wasn't sure that things were altogether straight in his own mind. This down-the-river fever—did it leave a man O.K. in the head, or were these ideas of his constantly cropping up merely part of the buzz? There was the Lard Pail, as he recollected, Ernie Runyon, superintendent, a zinc mine offering up herself to the limit, papers having to do with claims and ownership, a bank account restlessly growing, prospects to the skies—Clem felt his head. Was he still fevered?

The *padre* was endlessly coming and going. It was as if he held the whole village under his broad cassock—fathers, mothers, children, the flocks that gathered round, all births and deaths a part of himself, even the persistent welfare of Cant'lope. Clem decided to risk telling the *padre* about the Lard Pail. It seemed a matter of justice to let him know who they were, but his voice didn't sound right to himself when the time came:

"At least, *padre*, that's the way I recall it," he finished. "I may be foolin' myself about me and Matt bein' rich, but that's the way I feel about it—"

The *padre* smiled in a fashion that didn't make Clem feel any better. He said Rosario didn't count on payment for taking care of strangers. Matt was in no shape to talk this over with, and Clem ached from carrying it alone. This town would have been easy to rest up in, except old Matt didn't seem to get a grip.

Out in the plaza in front of the church was a cistern where the young women of Rosario came for water—it was their laughter he had heard so long. They smiled at him now, filling their jars, lifting them so slowly, steadying them on their heads and walking away.

Everybody in Rosario went to sleep for three or four hours around midday. Clem had the town to himself, and the one cool place of all was the church. Once inside, the first thing you saw was the face of a woman above the altar, a painting, light from the roof upon it. It was like the faces of the girls drawing water at the cistern, but richer than any. Clem studied this point long. It was a kind of miracle to him. If the faces of all the girls of Rosario were made into one, it would be like this; only all their happiness would have to be made into one, too.

Once, sitting before the painting, he forgot himself so utterly that he rolled one of his little paper twists and began to smoke, quite forgetting he was in sanctuary. He pinched out the fire, but the smoke continued to mount up into the old rosy dome. There was a big blank space on the canvas, the face not being in the center. Clem's mind was fascinated filling in the rest. To him the face of the woman was looking toward a doorway, and in that doorway was some one she had been waiting for for years.

Everything in Rosario moved about the old Spanish church; everybody went there, no differences of opinion about religion or the *padre's* place or right; even the dead couldn't get away; they were clustered in the church yard. If Matt were only up and about—this was just his kind of a show. Finally one day, sitting in the mission

church before the painting, Clem suddenly remembered the old Easter picture of the Yukon cabin; and then he knew, if anything could, this face above the altar would bring Matt back to life.

"YES," the *padre* said, and the sick man was carried, cot and all, to the great chairless floor where bare-footed people came to kneel. Matt, lying on his side, took in the place with gleaming eyes that finally settled upon the lighted face above.

"It was painted more than a hundred years ago," the *padre* said, "and portrays the youthful passion of the great Spanish artist, Luis Cordano, who came to this country in his early years. We call it the Face of the Magdalen, but in reality it is the face of one Eulalia Conejos, whom the artist loved, but could not have, since she belonged to another. We who worship here perceive in the face of the Magdalen the rapture of beholding the risen Lord. Is it not that of a woman who looks upon her great love?"

There was an audible breath from Clem.

The *padre's* voice moved in slow reflection, as if he had told the story many times with secret joy.

"For more than a hundred years, the people have worshipped before this face, and so great has been its influence, that more and more the little girl children of Rosario take on its resemblance—more and more do they express that beauty which their mothers adore before their coming. It is a true thing, señors, that that which we gaze upon, we become."

Clem hardly heard, his eyes fixed upon the flame of interest in the eyes of Matt.

"—a prophecy that the painting would one day be finished," the *padre* was saying, and then he laughed quietly. "You see, the passion of Luis Cordano at that time was not for the Lord's rising, but for Eulalia Conejos to turn to him, as she turns to the place where the stone was rolled away. But the prophecy persists, and all my people believe that one will come to finish the painting."

Clem saw Matt's hand raise from under the cover and make strange jerky movements toward the *padre's* broad back and then to the door. Clem managed to get the *padee* out and returned. Matt's tones trembled—

"Did you hear what he said the name of this church is, Clem?"

"Sure—"

"San *Clem*ente—did you hear that? It's your church, Clem!"

"Must be some sort of kin," said the other, his heart lighter than it had been for days.

The next day Matt was carried into the church again, and the *padre* left the partners together there. After gazing raptly, Matt began:

"Some of the things that keep poppin' up in my mind ain't clear yet—so much fever and worldly rustlin' after gold, Clem. If I'm loco you'll sure set me straight. What I needs to know right now is if you heard of a mine ever, not a gold mine, called the Lard Pail?"

Clem swallowed and coughed.

"Come to think of it, seems I have," he said.

"It's been comin' back to me as I lay here—but a lot of it's sort of dreamy yet—not to bank on. You ain't got any misgivin's about there bein' such a mine?"

"As I recall, we'd never have got way down here on a railroad and still have money in our pockets, if there hadn't been, and I feel certain of rememberin' Ernie Runyon—"

"That sure relieves me," panted Matt. "I was afraid it might be one of them deliriums—"

"If it is, I got one, too," said Clem, also relieved.

"That ain't likely. And bein' rich, Clem, I begins to see the meanin' clear why we came down here—"

"We came for gold—"

"We only thought we did, partner. I'm meditatin' myself on the real reason, right now."

The next day Matt showed distinctly more life in his eyes, even before being taken to the picture.

"What is it you see as the purpose of our coming?" Clem finally whispered, as they stared aloft at the face.

"I'm gettin' to that, Clem—gettin' to it right now. The thing we've honed after so long has happened; that's what I see, and we needn't be afraid any more of no cabin or no desert or no mountains between us."

Clem bent a little closer, a gleam in his eyes, but the gray of sudden fear around his thin mouth.

"Lyin' here these days— like comin' home to me—I see who brought this thing about—"

"You mean the *padre*—the painting?"

"No, partner, I mean Hassayampa—"

"You better not try to talk more today, Matt!"

"I ain't fevered and I ain't through. It was Hassayampa that brought it to us, Clem. It was them days down the river, when he came between us an' took to himself the jinx that always settled down on us alone. And now he's gone with it, and —— Clem, you never looked so good to me—"

Out of silence at length—

"I feel accordin'."

"And, Clem, I see how I made you suffer—"

"I've just been thinkin' the same about you."

There was a shining in Matt's eyes almost too bright for Clem to hold to.

"It was Hassayampa who done it—the old terrin'-tulu!" he murmured. "But, Matt, you ain't goin' to up and die now, havin' seen all this so clear?"

"Not by a whole lot, I ain't, Clem, and that's not all, either, I keep seein'." Matt's eyes turned up to the face of the Magdalen. "Another reason why we came down the river in the first place—"

"What's that?"

"To finish that prophecy out of the Lard Pail! I'm goin' to see it done—"

"You mean we're to get a painter and bring him down here?"

"That's what I'm meanin' this mornin', Clem. No, I ain't ready to leave here. I'm pickin' up every day right now, but you'd better not wait for me. We won't say nothing to the *padre* about why you're goin'—in case anything's happened to that income property of our'n."

"I see it, Matt," Clem said. "I've got to get up and get out of here."

"Not before you're ready to travel, Clem!"

"I'm ready right now. Why, I just can't wait to get that painter up here on a scaffold, if Ernie—if the Lard Pail ain't broke down—"

"When I think how we treated that mine and scorned the name of zinc!" Matt said with contrite heart.

That last evening Clem sat before the doors of the church and watched the girls coming and going with their water jars. They smiled at him. It was hard to leave Matt and this little town, and the faces that smiled out there in the sundown light—faces like the painting. But Matt was coming back to life on the fire of his great idea, and another thing helped; it wasn't necessary to go back up the river to San Cristobal to get out. The *padre* said it was possible to connect with the railroad at Santurce three days' journey to the east. Clem pulled his hat down tighter.

VI

TWO weeks later he reached Ardiente and hurried out to the mine before the news of his coming could reach the Lard Pail from town. He went straight to the superintendent's office where Ernie Runyon, who wasn't a desk man, happened to be held for a few minutes. Ernie looked up, squinting his eyes. He looked twice, pinning Clem with his look, then slowly rose.

"No, I ain't back to stay, Ernie. Matt sent his best to you, but wasn't ready to travel."

It was a kind of miracle to Ernie that the man before him could keep his feet. Every pound had counted with Clem before his departure from Ardiente and he had left not a few down in the Calsos country. The strain he was passing through right now was not from physical weakness, but Ernie didn't know that. There was certainly a mine called the Lard Pail, and everybody looked prosperous, but the matter of ownership having to do with himself and Matt, was unsettled as yet.

"No, I won't be stayin' over night, Ernie. Got to go on to New York, and back to the Calsos after that. Well, you couldn't call it a gold mine, but we struck it rich in a way. Tell you about it later. Matt figurin' to stay a spell longer. The fact is, Ernie—" here Clem's voice grew tight. "That fact is, we'll be needin' some money down there—quite a little money."

"Well, we've kept on makin' it for you. I don't know why. But look here, Mr. Daniels—you've been gone a long time and there are a lot of things I want to talk over—a lot of improvements—"

Clem breathed grandly:

"I know, Ernie, I know all that, and I'm trustin' you to carry on; with reason, that is. Matt believes in you, too, or we

wouldn't think of leavin' all to you. Make a list of the improvements and I'll try and study 'em out on the train. And perhaps, right now you might drive me down to the bank—"

CLEM had been lonely and bewildered as he traveled northward from Rosario; he was getting chillier and lonelier now with every mile east. At the Chicago station he very nearly turned round and went back into a wicket marked "West Bound." He moved with his back to the corner by the marble wall close to the steam radiator, which was working, but not enough to warm Clem—away from the crowds of people moving in a stream, each person seeming to know exactly what he was about. For quite a while he stood there, wondering if his will power would hold out.

Loose at last in New York, it was harder if anything. He didn't know how badly off he was until the end of the first day, and he held a match before one of his brown-paper twists and saw his hand tremble. Whenever he stopped any one to ask a question, the stranger stepped back and gave him a full-length look before answering. There didn't seem to be any coffee in New York with the right bite to it. In one place they brought him a cup of clayey mixture, swimming in its saucer, just as if all the world loved milk. A sick and starchy taste.

The second morning as he passed a great plate-glass window, he saw a large person in white shirt front, pouring out coffee for a girl who sat alone at a table. The girl looked lonely and hurried, but that coffee was right—a gleam of rich brownish-black, a touch of gold to it; it poured right, lay just right in the cup.

Hard to get into the place—part of the way under awnings and over mats spread on the stone sidewalk, then about an eighth of a mile of carpets through dim rose lights. Clem never did see that girl again. Finally when he sat down and asked for a pot of coffee, the waiter didn't go and get it, but kept on looking and finally said—

"Please, sir, will you kindly remove your hat?"

Clem did so with both hands, but he felt undressed and didn't wait for a second pot. There were picture stores, but Clem found it hard to make known what he wanted. His throat ached and closed, when they gave him the full-length.

Cold rain had begun and through the hours kept softly increasing; Clem wasn't getting the hang of New York, but kept on his way. There was a narrow door he entered at last; some smells had run in out of the rain, but few customers. A red-dabbed girl stood in the shadows and surveyed him, her eyes turning from his shoes to his hat and back again. Clem forced out his need for black coffee and the girl flung a scream toward the back of the place:

"Cup o' coffee—feed the milk to the kitty!"

A young stranger hurried in—black blotting paper shoes, a twitch to his mouth, whitish gleam in his eyes. Clem had seen that look in the gold countries when a man was about to kill himself—or somebody else. He sat down at the counter, second stool from Clem, and began to make a hurried sketch on the corner of a folded napkin, until the girl brought a plate of ham and eggs.

Clem grew absorbed. He couldn't see what the young man had been sketching, but he took it for a clue to the difficult passage into the world of art. He made up his mind not to get blind staggers from anybody's look right now.

"Mister," he said, when the young man was bolting his last bite. "I'd like to talk to you."

The other looked up with a start. He gave Clem that look, a swift piercing glance from head to foot.

"Mebbe you're not the man, 'cause I'm lookin' for just the right one," Clem went on. "But I'm thinkin' you might tell me—"

"What do you want?" The other's words were slow, but his glance at the door had been lightning swift.

"He seems to think I'm Sheriff of New York," Clem reflected, and said aloud: "I'll be glad to make it worth while for you. I want to get a picture painted—no, it ain't rightly a picture to be painted—it's a picture to be finished."

"Where's all this?"

"A picture in a church way down in Rosario, Mexico."

The other jerked out of his stool and darted past Clem to the door. Then he turned with a mocking laugh.

"You're good, you are! You don't want me—you want a real artist. Somebody in Bronson Munn's class for your kind—" and he was gone.

The girl coming in from behind raised a scream that the customer had not paid his check.

"Don't take on, miss. Take it out of this and keep the rest," said Clem placing a bill on the counter. "You see, that young man forgot to collect from me."

Outside a boy on a wheel passed by at the curb, whistling. The din of the town died out of Clem's ears. He chuckled. The whistle sounded so much like Matt; the coldness and emptiness of New York was lost in the wonder of his quest, suddenly gripped afresh. Early afternoon he passed a store-front with framed paintings in the window, braced himself and entered. A man with a beard came forward, continuing his examination of the caller as he approached.

"Excuse me," said Clem, "but I just came in to ask if you'd heard of the paintings of Bronson Munn, and if he's in New York?"

The store man seemed to have trouble with his neck.

"I believe he is, at the present time. Were you thinking of buying a canvas—a select grouping for exhibition—perhaps?"

"Well, no," said Clem. "Not just that exactly."

"Interested in the 'Twilight Set,' no doubt—"

"Well, no," said Clem. "I just wanted to inquire if his work is held reasonable high and in demand?"

Clem winced as the other stepped back for another full-length.

—"I regret to say there are two galleries in Europe where Mr. Munn's work isn't shown," the store man observed conservatively. "Two that I know of—"

"That might not be so bad," said Clem. "But he must be an old man by this time. Is he ailin' in any way, so he can't travel?"

The store man had to ease his collar again.

"Specializing in Saharas and Mediterraneans during the last year—considerable travel, connected with that, for Mr. Munn, I should say. No, we're not showing any of his work just at present. For a few days we did show one of his unfinished—just a little thing—seventy-eight hundred dollars, it brought—"

"Mebbe you could tell me where he stops—"

"At his atelier—"

Sounded like Italy to Clem.

"Or possibly at the Painters' Club—yes, by all means, try the Painters' Club."

Clem did so at once, being directed. There was an iron gate to pass, then a great door, then an inner door, but Clem did not reach that. A servant came forth saying Mr. Bronson Munn was not in the club at this time. Clem tried again in two hours. Another servant, but the same word.

"I'll call again," said Clem.

AT EIGHT o'clock that night, he straightened up in his chair. He was in his room, the kind of hotel room that drives a man to the streets.

"I've got to get up and get out of here," he said. "I'll give him one more chance tonight."

He wondered if he would have nerve enough to come back to this room, if the painter wasn't at the club. It was going to be a fight not to slink into a railroad station and start South.

"I'll see, sir," the servant said at the outer door. After several minutes, he returned and opened the door wider instead of closing it on Clem. "You are to follow me, sir."

Clem's limbs weakened under him, as if the going was a bit boggy.

In an inner room, he sat down before a white-haired old man with eagle-hooded eyes—white brows raised and thickened from squinting through many strong lights. Clem had seen old desert rats with hoods like this. The carpets and draperies and rose lights made him remember ages back to yesterday morning, when he undertook to get to that hotel coffee-pot. This was do or die; he had to think of everything. He lifted off his hat. Bronson Munn was oldish—that helped. And he didn't draw back for a full-length; his eyes merely settled on Clem's and sunk deeper and deeper in.

"He was a young barber from the Copper Country, Michigan, and we got together first up in Alaska. There was always a streak of religion, and that's where we had your picture—all winter, we had it—"

It was coming easier. Clem was getting quiet under the spell of the old man's eyes.

"I certainly do remember that old

magazine cover," laughed the painter. "I'd like to feel right now what I felt when the art editor took that mother-and-child. Also I began to eat regularly at that time—"

"And then we heard old Hassayampa at the Fashion Bar in Seattle. And we never would have gone to Ardiente if it hadn't been for Hassayamp—"

A queer kind of calm from the beak-faced old eagle sitting opposite—not a hurry in the world. Clem was seeing things he never saw before about his own life and what was queerer still, he was able to tell them. There wasn't anything to be afraid of.

"Even then we didn't find gold, but we opened up the Lard Pail. And then one night we heard the voice of Hassayampa again and it was our cue and we had to go."

Clem didn't know that it was one chance in a thousand that he had been let into the club at all. He wasn't aware that he was talking to one whose art had finally brought to his feet about all he could use of gold or fame. He only knew that here was an old man who could listen to a man's story like a lake taking in a troubled stream. It was like that—cold ache of loneliness passing out of his body as he talked.

"And you say the madness for gold went out of you when you got down the river?"

"After the fever came," said Clem. "Hassayampa showed us that, too—the worst of the gold fever and what comes from it."

And Bronson Munn gradually became familiar with the Red Hole, the Cold Shoulder, the Big Smokies, the Lard Pail and Down the River—first it was just a casual familiarity; then he felt himself pouring into it as into a great painting.

"I see I have been missing a lot," he said.

He began to see Alaska, Seattle, California and Mexico, as stations of a real work between two men. Some men make their works in stone, some in tones, some in words or paint; it was the work of these two to get into each other, and they had made a job of it. He studied this baldheaded one, with the red rim of a tight hatband around his temples and forehead, who had come to the club three times before today.

"Why, it's taken all North America—the whole length of the North American continent and nearly twenty years for you two to get together!" he said. "Yes, I've been missing a lot—I can see that. No, I don't smoke much, but I might try one of those little brown pipes of yours. Why, you fellows weren't looking for gold, you were looking for each other."

"First I heard was the bells a-ringin'. That was before we got there, proppin' each other up and Matt with no hat on. Then, lookin' out at the green branches leanin' over the stonework with the great red flowers in 'em, and the girls coming to the cistern with their jars and pitchers—everything hushed and easy. A lot of times before, I've got to the end of a place, but you'd never come to the end of Rosario—"

Then came the uncertain mention of a name, and this sentence—

"Yes, it was Luis Cordano, the *padre* said, and that he became pretty famous afterward—"

A moment later Clem's story was interrupted by the words of the other—

"I wonder if they really have a Cordano down there?"

"That's what the *padre* called it. As for me, I only know I like to look at it and it saved Matt's life. Then about them little girls who come to the cistern—"

"And you want me to paint in the Christ emerging from the tomb—on a Cordano?"

"The people are lookin' for it done," said Clem. "They've been waitin' for it so long down there that they have come to be patient about it, but Matt isn't patient. That's why I'm here. Matt's just livin' to get it done. Real? Well, real or not, that painting has put something in little Rosario that ain't in other Mexican towns—"

"Any chance of your partner not lasting it out until you get back?"

"No, he's livin' on the idea. The only thing I'm afraid of is goin' back without the right man—"

"It would be worth going that far to see if it's a Cordano—"

"I thought you would," said Clem, without a tremor. "You looked just the sort who would."

"It will take me a day or two to get ready, but it just happens that I can leave at this time. When do you think of starting down?"

Clem chuckled.

"Well, all I got to do is to get my satchel at the hotel and look around for a sack of gumdrops for Matt."

Author of "The Confirmation of Peter," "The Admiral," etc.

IN MOULMEIN, about three miles from where the steamers load teak, is a natural swimming-tank which abounds in harmless yellow water-snakes. At the gate leading to the compound of the tank is a sort of large sentry box where the *babu* who has charge of the place collects your fee before you swim. A narrow, very dusty road runs past the green of the compound.

At about nine in the morning, when the day was beginning to feel unpleasantly warm, an Englishman walked along that road. This in itself was an indication of the status of that Englishman, since Englishmen who can afford other means of progress do not walk along that road. There were, also, other signs of lack of affluence. The man's shoes were broken things and his socks were lacking. He wore trousers of unequal leg lengths and a somber undershirt. No coat. His growth of beard and whiskers was abominable. But what gave him a kind of distinction in vagabondage, making his disregard of the decencies more unpleasantly noticeable, was a single eye-glass in his right eye which glittered in the sunlight like a heliograph in a forest. At the entrance of the bath-compound a carriage waited; also servants in livery. And as the ragged European paused by the gate his antithesis in appearance came out of it. The servants stood at attention. The ragged man stepped forward, palm upward. The servants tried to prevent his approaching their master, Lord Cameron, but his lordship's drawl arrested their energy.

"Let the man speak to me if he wants to," said Cameron.

The servants stepped out of earshot. Cameron put a hand into his pocket and extracted some money which the ragged person eagerly accepted.

The world invariably addressed Cameron with much respect; both his personality and his position demanded this. The ragged man whispered to him:

"Pickhead, you luxurious brute! This unexpected meeting, even if I did arrange it, will save me some work. I can hardly expect a mere lieutenant-governor to understand, but, as the Bible says, hell's about to break loose. No, don't ask questions. I'm particular, and if I stand here talking too long people will think I know you. Have Walters meet me in Rangoon at ten o'clock of the night of next Friday. Now, don't forget. I can't let you come, too, because, even if you tried to disguise it, that nose of yours is known to every native in Burma. Why, even the children wake

up in the night, crying that they have dreamed about it."

"All right, 'Bugs,' " replied his lordship. "But don't look at me like that or I'll laugh, and one does not laugh at beggars. You are without exception the most outrageously filthy animal I have ever seen."

"Years ago I licked you for less than that, Pickhead." A friendly grin lurked behind the ragged man's terrible whiskers. "Good-by, old man. You look like a blasted Roman emperor."

And he backed away, bowing profoundly. The carriage drove away, but the *babu*, who had watched the proceedings with care, came out of his office.

"Hi, you," he said in his best English. "You must not beg here. But as you are so veree poor you may keep the money if you first give me my commission, which will be half of what was given you."

The ragged white man stared at the *babu*. It was a most disconcerting stare, a stare quite unbeggarly and unexpected. Then, in the choicest Bengali, he said things which can not be repeated. Indeed, there are no sufficiently fluent English similes. Bengali is a lovely language in which to make remarks both personal and unkind.

"And now back away from me as you would from a rajah," ended the white man, "or I'll drown you in your own tank."

And he turned and walked slowly down the glaring road.

II

THIS was in the days before the Burmans bundled up romance and animosity and drove the twins into obscurity in an automobile; when—although the wandering bands, cut off from the Burmese army of the last war with England, had more or less settled down—the spirit of the people, so well called "the Irish of the East," still seethed with discontent—a discontent fanned by aliens for their own ends, aliens willing to do the work the Burmese loathed, if the Burmese would stir up the trouble and do the fighting of which the aliens were afraid. The British secret service spread like a net over the country. Not that the British anticipated danger of more than usual acuteness. They were doing their best to regulate the province in such a way that no discontented Burman, son of some dead *boh*, could shoot up a village and steal a few women when he felt so inclined. This had happened very often. After it had happened, fifty Tommies and an officer would struggle through steamy jungle and eventually bring the murderer to the justice of the Andaman Islands. And in this secret service were perhaps eight British—men of proven skill and gallantry, men able to mingle with any sort of native undetected.

Such men were hard to find, and one of the most skillful, the most successful, was the man who had spoken so familiarly to Lord Cameron. To his intimates he was known as Bugs. On the service records he was known as Horace Sinnat, No. 006. To those British in Burma who took any notice of him he was known as "that poor ——, what's-his-name, who's gone native." To those who were not British, who saw him in the garb in which the *babu* of the tank saw him, he was known by various names, and was suspected of dodging the police.

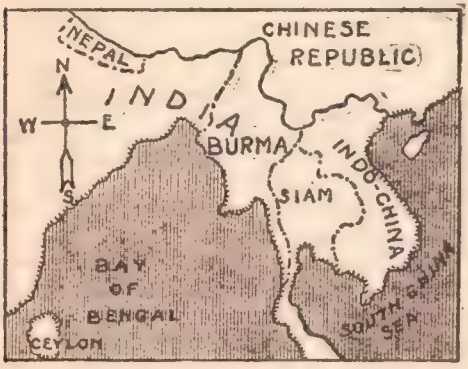
Sometimes he was native—without the eye-glass—and might look like anything from a fakir to a *babu* or Eurasian pedler, but more generally like a poor if not exactly honest Burman without family or visible means of support.

He walked off down the road, making for the river. The old Moulmein pagoda became visible. It is many miles from the sea, up the twisty river referred to, and one would have to have peculiar eyes to see the sea from it—piercing eyes capable of seeing through a dense forest.

By a wharf on the river, opposite the place where the elephants were working at the logs of teak, lay a small steamer, the *Mahraja*, loading teak. As the heavy logs were hoisted on board, various creatures, such as centipedes two feet in length, would drop from them on to the men working or on the steamer's deck, as the case might be. Over everything lay the heavy scent of the wood, and the sun burned down upon all things with impartial pitilessness.

Bugs desired to get to Rangoon, and as the river was the Salween, not the Irrawaddy, and the flotilla had never been seen there, he would have to go on the small steamer or some other like her. As the money given by Cameron was insufficient to pay his passage and as Bugs had no desire to go "out of character" by pulling

out a well filled money-belt, he would have to ingratiate himself with one of the white officers and beg a passage to Rangoon. This was comparatively easy for any white



man who was hard up and showed it in those days, although it was not always possible to leave Calcutta or Rangoon itself in this manner.

He sat down on the wharf, alongside the steamer, a few feet aft of No. 3 hatch. He lighted a beautiful foul pipe and watched the mongrel stevedores guiding the logs so close to him. Occasionally he spat upon a log with emphasis. The sun did not seem to trouble him. This was only right, as it was the superstition of the day that the sun seldom troubled those peculiar beings who went native until after the drink or opium reduced their resistance.

Any one seeing Bugs sitting there would at once assume that he had quarreled with his native wife, that she had called in half a hundred of her relatives and had ejected him, or else that the wife had died in the rapid way of native women in India and Burma. It would also be assumed that he was sitting on the wharf meditating where to find another wife.

The third officer of the *Mahraja* leaned over the rail. He was keeping tally of the logs, and he perspired freely—no awning being possible when loading teak logs. He saw Bugs and grinned with the friendliness of white man to white man in a country where there were so few of them.

"——" said the third mate, "you look comfortable, somehow."

"Outside or in?" Bugs smiled, speaking in his normal, cultivated voice, a tone always effective when used naturally by a poor white seeking assistance. To use it affectedly, as one not to the manner born, was effectually to cut off any chance of aid.

"Come on board and have a peg," invited the officer.

Bugs complied. Looking forward through the port of the officer's cabin, he studied the gathering native deck-passengers as he drank. He was fairly sure that a certain man would also leave for Rangoon that day, and the *Mahraja* was the only steamer sailing. The activities of this man, a Burman named usually Datoon, had brought Bugs to Moulmein.

THERE was no sign of Datoon among the chattering crowd of deck-passengers—all native of course—who were arranging their belongings on the forward deck as far away as possible from hatch No. 1 which had not quite finished loading.

Bugs turned to the officer, smiling again.

"Urgent private affairs," he said. "Financial business connected with my stock in a certain large bank demand that I go to Rangoon. But—er—er—well, you understand."

"Certainly," the officer smiled good-naturedly, although feeling sympathetically uncomfortable at meeting so decent a seeming white man and fellow countryman in such circumstances. "But—er—you will have to deck it, I'm afraid. But I'll fix it up so you can get your grub decently."

The officer returned to his work. Bugs strolled out on deck. Datoon had not the slightest idea that Bugs was interested in him, nor would he be allowed to have any, as it was one of Bugs' maxims that once a native suspected a secret agent, his usefulness, as far as that native was concerned, was at an end. It was fairly obvious, too, that other natives would soon know that the "gone native" was not all he seemed if one of them leaned to that opinion. So far no native had seen in Bugs anything other than the part he acted so well.

Bugs' sources of information, aided by his almost uncanny insight and understanding of the native mind, had not failed him. As the hatches were put on, just before the river pilot came on board, Datoon, garbed expansively in colorful *sarong*, accompanied by a man friend but, strange to say, by no woman, came on board the *Mahraja*, and found a place for himself on the forward deck. It was observable that he was a person of some consequence because the

other passengers made way for him and his companion treated him with something very like obsequiousness.

"Hum," mused Bugs as he loafed out of sight of the captain who, however kind, would feel it his duty to object to non-paying passengers until after sailing. "Hum, that's why the police are always getting into trouble. I want that gentleman badly, so does the government, so does the guard at Port Blair in the Andamans. I had to go to Moulmein to make sure of him and a lot of other things. The police would have grabbed him as soon as they had him spotted and—would have had to do the work all over again in six months with a regiment to help them.

"Like fishing—they'd have nabbed one fish, and not the biggest fish, while scaring all the others and the most important out of the net—Mr. Datoon will now, in a sense, act as a decoy. He will lend a feeling of security to his fellow conspirators by his seeming immunity. And they will talk quite comfortably about the brainless British. After they are safely locked up in Port Blair they will talk of other things and fight whenever possible among themselves."

The *Mahraja* twisted her way towards the sea, almost scraping against the heavy trees in the narrow reaches—from which trees the monkeys hurled impertinent remarks at their cousins as they passed. In the easy manner of coasters, the river mouth saw everything comfortable. The *Mahraja* might have been at sea for a month. The pilot left, and the course was made for Rangoon. Bugs began to walk about with the inquiring air of one who has never been on board a ship before and the ease of one who has paid money to be on board. The captain saw him, but said nothing.

The Buddhists inculcated the Hindus with their kindly philosophy until now the Hindu is "the gentle Hindu"; and the charity of the East has leavened the business instincts of the Englishman. Besides, the captain could not very well throw Bugs over the side, and to complain about his traveling without paying when the steamer reached Rangoon would mean an hour in a hot court and no recompense except the doubtful one of sending a fellow countryman to jail and implicating the third officer who, the captain was quite certain, would prove as good a liar as the "gone native".

Day dipped to the west and night came over the Gulf of Martaban like soft warm velvet. From some slight—and polite—distance Bugs watched Datoon performing experiments with the liver of a recently killed chicken. Eagerly did the Burman scan the omen. He spoke to his companion as if pleased. Bugs loafed near, not for information but for amusement. Hepatoscopy was a form of divination he had studied. In native garb he had even made money at it. In the toneful Burmese language he spoke politely.

"Pardon me, but I trust the gods gave you better words than they gave to me."

Datoon grinned. For while Buddhism is the correct religion of the Burmese, spirit worship, sheer demonology prevails; and while the more civilized may deny this at times if things are going well with them, they are apt to admit their weird belief as readily as the hill people, whose official faith it still is.

Datoon grinned, and a million stars who had witnessed the performance of divination, as they had watched similar performances for thousands of years, twinkled sympathetically.

"The soul of the bird," said Datoon, "showed me the future the gods have made for me, as does a river show the shining moon. My days will be well. I go, friend, to marry in Rangoon, and I have seen, as the blood went out, that my marriage will be happy, with many delightful children. What can man ask more than that—a good wife and many crowing babies."

"No more," answered Bugs gravely. "You are favored."

He turned away, amused by the lying of Datoon. That gentleman's divination had, indeed, turned out well, and babies are the Burman's delight—the Burmese babies are probably the happiest in the world—but Bugs knew quite well that Datoon was not about to be married and that his interest in the immediate future had nothing to do with children, of which he already possessed sixteen.

III

AT TEN o'clock Friday evening in Rangoon Bugs slumped dejectedly into a low drinking-place. He was quite evidently in the final stages of decay. His eyes were bleared, his hands trembled and he was filthy. He asked for whisky.

"Money first," said the half-breed barman, sneering.

"I will pay when —" began Bugs pleadfully.

"Money first or no whisky, you low animal," said the bar-man. "Get out of here before I have you thrown out."

As Bugs turned away, apparently about to weep, an Englishman who was seemingly of the genus bounder walked into the place, swelling with self-importance in his nice clothes. Observing the cruel situation of Bugs, he exploded with loud, self-advertising charity.

"Give the poor —— a drink. I'll pay for it. He's a white man or he has been. I believe in being a Christian, I do. Here, my poor man, here is whisky. Come over here and sit at this table and tell me all about yourself. I am always interested in you fellows."

Bugs almost fell into the chair at the small table, and the bounder spoke with genial comradship to the half-breed.

"Surprizing what tales these down-and-outs can tell, ain't it? It's well worth the price of a few drinks even if they do lie to one now and then."

The half-breed, Chinese and negro, agreed servilely, and the bounder sat down at the table with Bugs, a bottle between them.

"Fill up and forget your troubles, old man," said the bounder loudly.

Bugs filled his glass.

"I can't be sure whether you'd have made a better clown or social worker, Walters," he murmured. "As the typical cad you beat all I ever saw, and I've seen a lot. Here's how!"

"How," said Walters. He lowered his voice. "And what?"

"Plain —— if it gets loose," said Bugs. "And they kept so darn quiet about it that I—even I was lucky to smell the affair before it burst."

"As bad as that?" said Walters.

"Quite so," said Bugs. "Ever hear of a king named Thibaw?"

Walters said nothing.

"As you know," went on Bugs, "Thibaw died the other day in Ratnagiri. As you also know, he had several children. When you were a boy, you were a good boy and learned your lessons. So you know that when a king lost his kingdom and died, leaving an eldest son—as well as other sons —the eldest or other son generally got it into his head that he was being defrauded, that he was really a king and that it was his duty to the people to become king in fact. That sketches the act. The wonder of it is their keeping so quiet. I have felt at times that some sort of master-mind, as the novels say, is behind this thing. It's too darned well managed for a Burman."

"Master mind?" Walters smiled.

"Oh, I know it sounds foolish, and I can't imagine how a master-mind—European—could get into this affair. So, if there is a master mind, he is more likely to be Chinese or high caste native of India proper. Still, he may be Burmese, although they are usually better at tactics than strategy. However, I have no trace of him. Indeed, I'm lucky to have any knowledge of this revolution intended. But I do know some of the Burmans implicated. And one, who traveled from Moulmein with me, complicates the whole affair while adding to its seriousness."

"What does he call himself?" asked Walters.

"He calls himself Datoon. But you will have heard of the famous Maha Bundula?"

Walters sipped at his drink. He, of course, knew the history of Burma as well as did his companion, but he fell into Bugs' light vein, knowing that when things were really serious Bugs liked to pretend to jest.

"Well, this chap Maha is the national hero still—the Nelson and Napoleon of Burma. Like Thibaw and every other respectable Burman he had many descendants. That Maha has been dead for about seventy years only makes the position of his grandson, Datoon, the stronger. The Burmans love superstition. Indeed, it's even odds whether Datoon or the offspring of Thibaw, Mah Bong, is the real leader. Here, again, I feel some one behind them both, that master-mind chap. But maybe I'm nervous."

"What have you done?" asked Walters. "Cameron only said that you had warned the government of possibilities of general trouble without giving details."

"Couldn't give details. Didn't have them. Besides, my work is not to advise the government how to stamp out trouble but to prevent its getting to where it has to be stamped out by making timely disposal of the trouble-makers," answered Bugs.

"And we?" asked Walters.

"I gave them what seemed enough time to meet to plan final details." said Bugs gravely. "You and I go tonight to get them, catch the headmen, and the plot falls to pieces. We must go alone, with no one to help us, or we would not get within yards of the conspirators, even if we lived to hear them conspire."

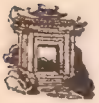
"Now?" asked Walters.

"We start now," replied Bugs. "Must if we want to get lost in what crowd there may be and, so, get to where we want to get."

"And the place is not hard to guess in this country of reverence to religion where so few are religious," said Walters.

"Quite so," said Bugs. "The Swe Dagon Pagoda."

IV



STANDING upon an eminence one hundred and seventy feet above the city of Rangoon, rising nearly four hundred feet higher in a cone of gold taller than the dome of St. Paul's cathedral, the wonderful pagoda seemed to be a part of the night itself, lifted seemingly towards the great arch of the calm sky, as if the stars were anxious to know what thing of earth could glitter as brightly as they. As a contrast, the most broken, diseased and vilest beggars crowded about it in unpleasant horde.

"Curious, ain't it, Walters," said Bugs as they went towards the pagoda. "I don't see why 'ain't' isn't perfectly good English. But what is more curious is the criticism that will spout from certain arm-chair officials, who ought to know better, if our efforts this evening fail—if something happens not according to our best desires. Those who have never experienced the difficulty of getting information from and among the Burmese will suggest that I ought to have obtained enough to enable the government to do something immediately.

"Suppose I had. Well, we know the government. In, say, three weeks, if the government became unusually active, it would do something. Likely fail to accomplish what it started out to do. During this three weeks the leaders of this revolution would, after agreeing on their plans, scatter among their followers and hide so cleverly that the entire British army would be needed to find them. Great scot, one would think that after the years of jungle fighting the government would know something! But no. They send chaps out from England who imagine that the teak forests of Burma are about as dense as the bit of a wood behind the village at home. It ought to be drummed into those fellows that the forests are almost as dense as they are themselves.

"Walters, what we are trying to do tonight is the best, is all we can do unless we want to let thousands of people be killed and raise the taxes a penny on the pound. We must get into the pagoda, into whatever relic chamber our men are. 'But,' will say the critics, 'if you had first surrounded the pagoda with a regiment your men could not have escaped.' Gorgeous, ain't it. Imagine, in the first place, the very thin red line to which the regiment would be reduced after surrounding the pagoda. Then give every Tommy the brains of Socrates, the eyes of Argus and he would utterly fail to distinguish a conspirator from an ordinary beggar when the Burmans started to dodge their way through the thin red line.

"Of course this also implies that our prey would wait until the regiment, with its boots rattling on the bricks, got into position—its officers giving orders in the deaf and dumb language. But what's the use? In my opinion, the best, the only thing to do is to manage to get into the pagoda. Then cow or bluff the three or four men we want, and arrest them. If we can't do that, we will have to fight. Once the ringleaders are safely locked up, the different bands of Burmese will have no one to guide them, and the government, in its leisurely way, can proceed to search the houses and villages where every man has his rifle and ammunition safely packed away. Imagine how long this thing has been brewing when you vision those rifles and powder. And imagine the skill and cunning. Oh, we know where they got the money—they have it—and we know where they bought the stuff. Great Britain is not the most popular nation on earth and, besides, there are clever chaps who make a business of supplying arms to those able to pay their price for them.

"So. And now we are almost there. You are a bounder tourist who has picked up a 'gone native' Englishman and made

him so drunk that he is willing to take the risk of getting you into the pagoda. You, of course, haven't brains enough to realize what a chance you are taking. I, as a gone native, know they won't hurt me, and I am too drunk to care much if there was any danger to myself. You have, also, given me money. I have, in this character, been in there several times alone. They kicked me out quite good-naturedly. But the inmates were only innocent, if heathen, priests of Budda then. We get quite a different mental atmosphere tonight. And to get you in is vastly different from the casual, drunken strolling in of a poor "gone native" like myself. You will see. I must apologize in advance, Walters, if you get knocked on the head. It's your own fault you're a secret service man, and there is really no other way than the one we are taking.

"Now for it. We, first, try to lose ourselves among the beggars. I am sure that if you were made up as I am, it would look more suspicious, for what would two of us be doing there together. "Gone natives" don't get clubby. Besides, you never could act the part. It's risky, old man, but really, there is no other way. Of course, I thought of trying it alone, but I expect too many to handle, and they're as quick and nasty as snakes when cornered."

"I'm much obliged to you for giving me the chance when there were other men you could have got," said Walters simply.

Bugs pressed his arm in friendliness.

"But no other who can act the greasy bounder as cleverly as you can, old man," he whispered.

A pagoda is not like a great church. Above the level of the earth it is solid brick. Imagine a gigantic bell cast into solid shape instead of being made hollow, then covered all over with gold.

Under the pagoda are the so-called relic chambers. Certain things held as sacred are there, but the majority of the relics have to do with things hidden because of fear of what the police might do. While this maze of chambers may not be as remarkable as the old Chinatown in San Francisco, it certainly rivals that warren of iniquity pretty closely, while any European who imagines he knows all about it is badly mistaken. Even the marvellous Bugs, who has become a legend of the secret service, did not pretend to know it thoroughly, and no white man ever lived who knew it better; while, since his time, it can not be doubted that the chambers have been added to and made more like a maze.

THEY went up the rise. The night filled everything like warm, dark mist through which the stars send undulating rays. The heavy scent—somewhat different from the prevailing scent of teak-strewn Burma—peculiar to Rangoon vied with the night. On the mound of the pagoda, the beggars who saw the two white men first, thinking them strayed drunkards, harried them for alms. Bugs met their attacks with words that ripped wickedly through his abominable whiskers and an eye that glared evilly through the monocle.

"Brother swine," he said conversationally. "This fool is my meat. Do you imagine, other hungry crows, that I intend to share my pickings with you. He wants to see the pagoda inside! And I will have to let a priest or two take a bite from him. He thinks the pagoda is like one of his own silly churches. He also thinks that the priests are as well behaved as the ministers of his own stupid religion, which I grew tired of many years ago. Let us pass, brothers of the mongrels and myself. There will be sport within, but your place is outside lest your festering sores disturb the sleep of the holy relics!"

All this with the fraternal solemnity of a brother beggar who is also most comfortably drunk at the expense of his companion. The appreciating Burmese of that ilk as well as the mongrel natives of half the states of India grinned at their white confrère and, as honorable members of the same profession, left Bugs to enjoyment of his "meat."

"Luck is with us," whispered Bugs as they slipped rapidly in among the heavy shadows. "I did not expect trouble with the beggars, but I did anticipate meeting a priest or two at the entrance. They must have gone to have a drink together. My low suppositions must keep in character with my appearance and assumed alcoholic condition. Hurry as quietly and inconspicuously as your large feet and loud clothing will permit."

It was sound strategy of Bugs to tell the beggars, who in any case would have seen for themselves, that the well dressed Englishman wanted to go inside the pagoda.

It helped to get rid of them by satisfying their curiosity after they had served their purpose. Lost in the crowd of them, Bugs and his companion had become concealed from possible prying eyes. One or two beggars might look forward enjoyably to watching the ejection, but the rest would forget the two whites. Besides, lack of apparent effort to be inconspicuous was an obvious aid to success and would serve to dull suspicion.

They found themselves alone around a bend in the ancient wall. A wandering breath of air met them warmly. It might have been the essence of the East distilled by a magician of chemistry, to which he had added a distillate of Burma. And it wakened thoughts of opium, half buried temples and the mystery of extreme antiquity; also of concealed loot. Ready to act their parts the moment they met a priest, they hurried forward stealthily, praising their unexpected luck.

"The Lord," mused Bugs, whose success was largely due to his ability to ignore strain, "the Lord seems to be on the side of the loudest dressed white man and the filthiest 'gone native' in Burma."

Turning a corner, a priest met them, hissing out words of angry order to be gone. Bugs advanced to him, a drunken white man cringing, and as the raging priest laid hands upon him, Walters lifted his revolver and brought the butt heavily against the priest's head. Hastily the white men dragged the body to one side where the shadows thrown by the low-hanging lamp were thickest. The priest was only stunned, but a skillfully arranged gag prevented his calling too loudly when he recovered. His hands and feet were also tied.

"Sorry," whispered Bugs. "I hoped to avoid this. It complicates matters. He is sure to be found sooner or later, and if he is discovered too soon, it will likely alter our plans. Hush!"

He pulled Walters against the wall as he heard the footsteps of a man walking hurriedly towards them along the passage from the entrance of the pagoda. As the lamp light showed his face, Bugs was not surprized to see Datoon, evidently hastening to the place of meeting.

"Luck again smiles on us," he whispered to Walters. "Follow this chap. He will lead us to the meeting place, and he's in too much of a hurry to look back. That removes one of the biggest obstacles. I did not know where our friends would meet. I was sure they would meet in the pagoda, but the pagoda is a big place, and the relic chambers are many and mixy."

They followed, meeting no priests. But Bugs' surprize at this soon became a comforting guess. Arrangements had been made to keep the priests as inconspicuous as possible that night by their chief of priests.

It was only a year since two of the priests had been quietly disposed of for accepting money of the police for a reason that never transpired. Bugs knew of this, but he also knew that it was the only case on record in Burma, as priests are usually beyond the approach of Europeans. Yet it seemed that the head of the pagoda was in doubt about the fidelity of his brethren—likely a needless fear inspired by the action of the two referred to and kept alive by the powerful leaders of the Burmese using the pagoda for a place of meeting. Be this as it may—and, indeed, it may have been only a chance coincidence—Bugs and Walters followed Datoon without meeting any one.

In places behind curtains they heard many as they went along, but none hindered As Bugs had said, luck was on the side of a loudly dressed person and a dirty "gone native" so far! But it was an eerie and nerve-trying progress, dodging in and out the shadows as they followed Datoon. What traps lay in wait for these trespassers into those jealously guarded vaults? Datoon, knowing every danger, could have seen his followers and, with the cunning that was his, be leading them into something deadly.

The Malay, the Chinese—these blended and made more ferocious by Thibetian strain. This was Datoon, under his smiling and lazy Burmese countenance—the atavism aching to win his country back from the conquerer, compelled to conquer in defence of Indian territory—the Datoon who, with his followers, planned not to leave an Englishman alive or an Englishwoman unviolated and cruelly killed. As it was in the mutiny. Into what pits filled with snakes or hungry rats might the Burman lead? Or, indeed, into what horrors might they not fall accidentally? Thus the thoughts. But Bugs and Walters, trying to suppress them, went cautiously onward.

To charge against rifle fire would have been a comfortable proceeding by comparison. For there was the getting back, the

finding their way through this maze of passages and into God's free air again. Blazing the trail was impossible, even if chalk marks could have been made on those damp, moss-grown walls. Besides, they were continually finding themselves in small squares from which half a dozen gloomy passages branched. It seemed that only by some seventh or savage sense did Datoon continue to find his way. But of course he had the system of counting invented by the priests. Even Bugs began to feel depressed. For—perhaps injured by fighting—how could they expect to meet no priests when returning? And how find the way along which to return? Bugs visioned a horde of priests grinning down at Walters and himself as the fierce Canton rats ate them. He braced himself with difficulty. And Walters—of that bravest type of man who is afraid, yet forces himself to act bravely—Walters could only grit his teeth and wish the trial had ended.

THE passages sloped downward as if to the bowels of the earth. There were so few lamps that the secret service men followed by sound. They could no longer see Datoon. This, of course, increased the danger. And then, suddenly, the light footsteps of the Burman ceased to echo in the dark, and Bugs and Walters stood alone in the ghastly silence, as if in a long-deserted mine thousands of feet underground. A faint trickle of water dripped somewhere—ten yards or a mile away in that whispering gallery. How long, how far had they walked since the last lamp had faintly showed the ghostly walls? No sound but the faint trickle of water; no light. Lost where they could expect only lingering death if no one came to guide them.

"Well," mused Bugs, "this is miles farther than I ever got before—or any white man ever got. I don't blame these chaps for using this place to plot in. What a lovely time the police would have trying to get them. I thought I knew this country pretty well and all its fancy notions, but I never dreamed this labyrinth went so far down or so far anyway. You could lose the British army in this place, and then hire the German army to find the British, and lose that. These passages go for miles. Must cover more ground than Rangoon. We have walked for more than an hour. Hour and a half, nearly. And we are not at the limits of the place, I am certain of that. How many thousands of years did it take to hollow these caves out by hand? But I'm not here to indulge in archeological speculation. We are here on business."

He gripped the arm of Walters.

"Try and stop breathing," he whispered "If we do, we may hear something."

They held their breath, but heard nothing but the beating of their hearts and the trickle of water, which now irritated them and seemed to be laughing at their plight.

They drew in air, like exhausted divers.

"Again," commanded Bugs.

Again they stopped breathing, but heard nothing to help them.

"Now, again—keep it up. We may have to hold our breath many times before we hit on the moment when our friends make a noise. I don't think they are very far away, somehow, even if distance in this —— place does seem unnatural, supernatural."

As his lungs seemed about to burst with their need for fresh air, Bugs tried to forget his discomfort by thinking—his ears as attentive as if his mind had been at rest, and again he concluded that Datoon, deep in his own affairs, had not observed Walters and himself. Then he had not disappeared intentionally to lose them? No, for unless unseen priests were waiting, watching—no, for not even the priests, accustomed to the pit, could see without light. So no priests were waiting to pounce out on them when tired of enjoying their plight. This was all logical, and Datoon had not dodged Walters and himself. Again, as he took in breath, Bugs felt certain that the conspirators were relatively close.

Again and yet again did the secret service men strain lungs and ears. Then, at perhaps the tenth time, both men heard something. And that something was a human voice. In that draughty maze it sounded like a disembodied voice, like a voice that had just left a corpse and was wandering around trying to find another habitation. It was worse than eerie, it was positively terrifying. The dark, the awful feeling and fear of being buried alive deep underground, and this naked and horrible voice! And the voice gave no clue in that dungeon of echoes to the men the secret service men sought. Like a ghost, the voice sounded once and was gone, but its haunting

remained, haunting with implications and possibilities, with questions. There was a moment when both Bugs and Walters wondered if a word of theirs—although they had uttered no such word aloud—had followed them slowly, waiting to sound suddenly and unexpectedly upon their hungry ears. For the voice had uttered just one lonely and solitary word. And that word had been a sound English curse.

Bugs and Walters were seeking Burmans whose name and station they knew. In that ghastly pit of a place only Burmans were supposed to be allowed. They sought, with blind eyes, Burmans, but the voice had been the voice of an Englishman!

Walters gripped Bugs' arm convulsively. The long strain, the awful dark, the horror of being lost underground—these for a moment held Walters until time and space seemed to lose their meaning, and he grasped at his companion like a drowning child. Actually he felt as if some great unseen hand had lifted him across the world where he had frantically sought to find his position until the eerie curse had told him he was in the dungeons of the Tower of London!

At Bugs' reassuring touch he recovered himself as far as the circumstances permitted. It was worse than fruitless to speculate about the voice, to ask what the voice of an Englishman was doing there. Did the sound of it give any clue to the whereabouts of the speaker? The passages were draughty. A voice might blow here and thither. Bugs lay down on the slimy floor. He sighed with satisfaction. A cool and steady air blew softly on his face.

"We follow this bit of air current up wind," he mused. "It's our one and only chance. Perhaps the voice of the gentleman using bad, if excusable language, came along it—to be blown about in this —— of a place."

THEY began to creep up the faint stream of air. When—it seemed hours ago—they had left the faint light of the last lamp, they had believed that the great darkness would become less opaque as their eyes became accustomed to it. Actually it seemed to grow darker.

"They say the finger tips are our most sensitive parts," mused Bugs as they groped forward. "But not when they are covered with the slime of ages and bruised with the rock of the Swe Dagon."

And he and Walters nosed their way along like two dogs of unusual and clumsy breed.

It was a long chance. For anything they knew there might be a hundred passages, but only one which led to the man whose voice they had heard. They trusted to the air. Presently they bumped into a fork of downward leading ways. They quested eagerly at three of them. And, as if to reward their pluck and patience, the voice came again. Now it no longer daunted. It cheered by its conversational tones although the words were vile. It was the voice of the Englishman, but now he spoke Burmese.

"If you Burmans don't want to offend your wives by amusing yourselves with the Englishwomen," said the voice of that Englishman, "why, there are Chinese and negroes who won't be so particular. And if there aren't enough of those we can easily import more. Good idea when we hold the country, import laborers, offer 'em good pay and ladies."

"That," said another, a Burmese voice, "will be your department. I shall merely go to the city of my ancestors and govern the country from there. I shall use the old ways, but we will buy much artillery and hire many aliens to do our fighting."

Bugs mused:

"Does that miscalled white man expect to be able to do what he says, or is he just amusing himself or playing a deeper game. The last, I think. That he is here shows that he is too clever to make a fool of himself. What is his game, anyhow? Never mind. Here's where we spoil it."

The two men crept forward, and now they went along like two ungainly snakes.

"That was the heir-apparent who answered the Englishman," mused Bugs. "Datoon has a deeper voice."

They were very near. The voices went on continuously, deep in plot. Bugs and Walters wriggled around another corner. At another, a streak of light showed them their destination. They crept toward it. But their caution was hardly needed, the conspirators being so eager in dispute. And quite naturally they did not anticipate interruption, especially not from the secret service of Britain.

Again Bugs breathed more comfortably.

Unless there were men in that lighted chamber who were silent, only three men—the wanted three leaders—argued there.

"Don't use your gun," he tapped in Morse on the back of his companion's hand. "We dare not shoot in here. It would bring a horde on us, like upsetting a nest of wasps."

Walters O.K.ed the order.

Bugs himself would show no gun. He was a "gone native," a thing of poor ways who would sell any gun he could lay his hand on for whisky. At the last moment, just before they entered the chamber, he found himself wondering just how clever the traitor Englishman was.

Then he looked into the place and almost whistled.

He had expected to see three men squatting native fashion. Instead, he saw three men seated at a mahogony office table in comfortable chairs. Above them a lamp of solid gold shed a light that almost blinded after the long darkness. The lamp was ages old. As old, it seemed, if not older, than the walls. The contrast was acute. The three men were smoking the cheroots of the country.

It was Walters' play, and he acted. Bugs beginning to register acute misery.

"Now," said Walters loudly, "you poor drunken thing, now I have led you to a light, to where there are people. Now you will explain why you said you were a qualified and licensed guide to this —— place. I won't pay you the five rupees I promised. You drunken rotter. I thought I was never going to get out of this maze."

Then to the three men in the room:

"I am glad we happened to stumble into you gentlemen. No doubt you can direct us to the right way to get out of here. This filthy animal, whom I intend to have arrested, pretended he knew the ways in here, and lost me. He even tried to rob me."

The Burmans, showing no surprize, with Oriental stolidity, looked at the Englishman as if for suggestions or orders. That one, cooler even than his companions, merely smiled.

"Very clever. Too clever," mused Bugs. "Fancy being surprized this way, after all he's said, too, and taking it this easily. He's dangerous. Hope I don't have to show a gun. Don't want to go out of character. If I do, good-by to my 'gone native' disguise forever."

"Oh, come in, won't you," the Englishman was saying. "So sorry you lost your way, and very glad to be of assistance. Certainly we can direct you. My friends can, I should say, as I am a stranger here. I am an engineer asked in to try to arrange the sanitary system of this vast place. They have none, really, you know. My name is Menzies. Come in and rest before starting back to daylight or nightlight again."

Thus, for the first time, the great Bugs met the greatest of his enemies. Regarding Menzies' activities prior to this, nothing is known. His name is another mystery, his real name. But, as all India knows, he tricked and fooled the government for years, even into giving him free pardons, and he died gallantly, giving his life to save the head of the government he had fought so long.

"You low animal of dirt, stand over there," Menzies turned from Walters to address Bugs. He again spoke to Walters. "Have a chair, have a chair. Sit down and rest. Take my chair, old chap."

And as Walters—thinking it the best as it was the most natural thing to do, with Bugs able to make no sign—as Walters sat down, Menzies put his hand carelessly into his coat pocket. Then, as quick as a striking snake, he pulled out a heavy revolver.

"Yes, sit down, and sit very still, Mr. Walters, or this thing will go off. I am more than glad to let you rest here before, er—before sending you on your way. I know nothing more pleasant than entertaining a secret service person in this fashion."

THE gun and one eye trained on the astonished Walters, the other eye stared at Bugs, but not suspiciously. Bugs thought the eyes were green eyes, but not for a moment did he step out of character. He laughed.

"It's as if you were arrested, not me," he said sneeringly to Walters. "And so that's why you said your name was Robinson, eh?" He spoke directly to Menzies. "He has a gun, too, mister. I know he has—in his right hip pocket—because he threatened to shoot me when we had our little talk about my not being a guide."

Menzies laughed.

"Thanks, but I knew it," he said as he disarmed Walters. "And now that I have this chap where I want him I will cease

being rude to you. I rather like you fellows. The so-called powers that be say that I belong to the the underworld, also. So we are compatriots. Whose idea was it to come here so quietly. You saw the light long before you got here?"

"Mine," said Bugs. "I was scared a bit, and thought a mess of priests might be in here ready to scoff us. I didn't want to come to the light at all, but his nibs there insisted. Now I understand why. But he's a mighty poor policeman. Why didn't he get out his gun first and hold you up?"

"Because he daren't shoot, old man. He knows that if he did the priests would hear the noise and, as you say, scoff him."

"Hum, that's it, eh?" Bugs walked quite naturally towards the table, staring rudely at Walters. He turned to Menzies. "I was looking for a drink," he said. "Thought you might have a bottle of whisky on the floor the other side of the chair. I would have. Couldn't see through this secret service man, but you did. Ha, ha. That's a joke. Say, mister, haven't you anything to drink around here. I've had a tough walk and need something?"

Menzies laughed, and took a flask from a pocket. He handed it to Bugs.

"This is medicine," he said, "for emergencies. Don't use it myself, but you did me a good turn bringing this fellow here, even if you did not know you were doing it. I was tipped off that he might get after me, and tonight he was seen by a beggar friend of mine who sent the news in—when he hired you to show him round. He wanted you with him so he could better pretend to be what he seemed. Better be careful after this about who hires you. Hey, don't empty that thing."

Bugs handed the flask to its owner and grinned at the two Burmans.

Datoon grinned back in a friendly way.

"They chased me out of Moulmein the other day," said Bugs pointing to Datoon, "and that gent traveled with me on the boat."

Datoon corroborated this, adding words which, even if Menzies had ever dreamed of suspecting Bugs would have established that "gone native" as harmless.

"Say," went on Bugs, "that was great stuff you told me you saw in the chicken liver, wasn't it. Would you mind if I told what you told me you saw?"

Datoon did mind. In a lax moment, overjoyed at what he believed he had seen, he had lied comfortably about the omen; but it was most impolite, as Bugs knew well, for the recipient of the news to mention it again; and the Burman showed his annoyance.

But Bugs knew what to do. He saw his plan working. He ignored the frowning protest of Datoon, and said, as if innocently, to Menzies:

"He said he saw funny things in the liver." The drink seemed to work very quickly in Bugs. He swayed a little, and his voice had a strange lilt. "He said the liver told him that he would succeed in what he wanted to do. He said that he was going to be king of Burma. That there was another chap, son of old Thibaw, who wanted to be king, but who had no chance because he, Datoon, would stick a knife into him when he wasn't looking. Funny talk for a chicken liver, what?"

Menzies flushed. His hand gripped the side of the table. He knew that there was jealousy between the two Burmans, and that that jealousy had brought about two factions in the rebellion, but he had hoped to smooth the thing over until he himself obtained what he was after.

Now this babbling "gone native," who had chanced to travel on the same boat with Datoon, had seemingly spoiled things. Menzies saw that he would have to act quickly. But the Burmans were quicker.

There was a sort of hissing, as if two angry cobras had met, and the light from the splendid lamp flashed along two slender, keen knives. Two arms worked lightning fast. Before even Menzies, who could think and act as quick as any man in the world, before Menzies could do anything, the two rival Burmans had stabbed one another in perhaps a dozen different places and were lying on the floor, trying with their last strength as life ebbed out with their rapidly flowing blood, to stab one another again. The bulldog's grip is nothing compared to the urge to kill of that blood when the desire for death takes it.

The souls of Datoon and Mah Bong were whirling along the dark passages, naked as the voice had seemed, still fighting, before the swiftly moving Menzies could move to stop the fight. Forgetting for the moment his own position or else subconsciously feeling that the "gone native" would warn him if Walters moved, he stooped over the dead

men, swearing angrily. And Walters, stepping cat-like, snatched his own gun from Menzies' coat pocket and stuck it sharply against that one's back, whispering:

"Hands up and keep them up. If the priests are to get me, they'll get you first, and that low "gone native" next. Make any sound and I shoot. You'll die before I will, anyhow. Just that little slip, eh, mister? Or did you think that dirty friend of yours, whom I will attend to later, would have guts enough to take the risk of warning you if I moved? Keep 'em up! Now, stand up straight and keep quiet or this will go off. Behave now!"

Menzies obeyed. He was quite calm, but his lips moved in a sneering curse at Bugs, while he cursed himself mentally for not taking better care. At that, any man would have been put off his guard by the rapid tragedy and the feeling that Bugs was a friend.

"You said you would be delighted to guide and I know you know the priests' system of counting your way," said Walters. "Now, take me out so I can lock you up where your planning to upset the government won't do any harm. And you, Mr. 'Gone Native,' walk ahead of me, too. By this chap's side. Go quietly. Not that you're dangerous, but because I mean to take you both to jail. Ah, Menzies, you're wise. Better take a chance on serving a prison term at the Andamans than on my gun missing fire. March, now, both of you!"

BILLY DIXON AND ADOBE WALLS

***by* Raymond W. Thorp**

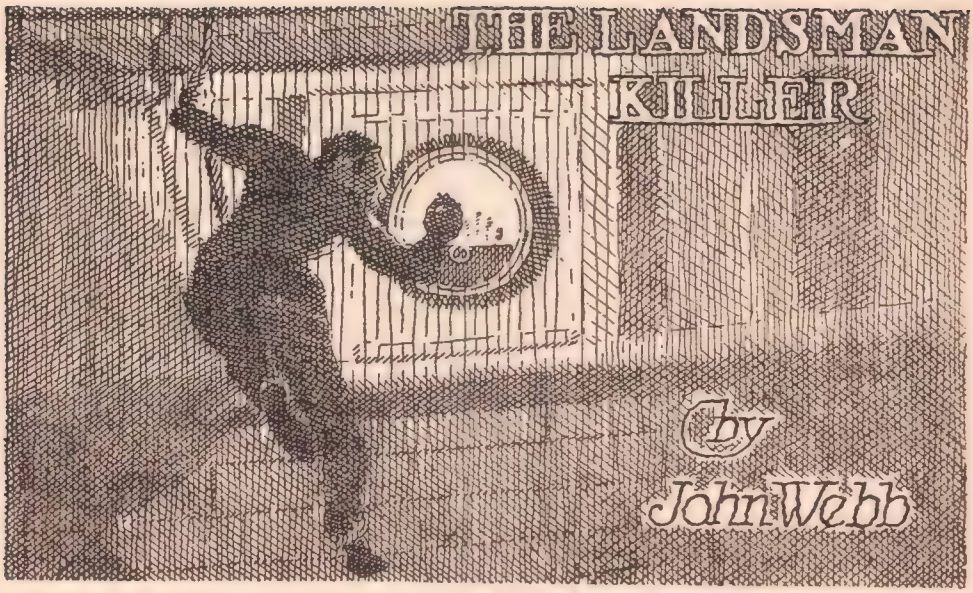
ONE INCIDENT which had to do with the proper settlement of Indian troubles in the southwest in the early seventies was the pot-shot of Billy Dixon with his old Sharps buffalo gun. It happened in this manner:

Among the several thousand Indians who attacked the handful of scouts at Adobe Walls, under Quanah Parker, was a head medicine man of the Comanches, who undertook to foretell the destiny of the attacking party. This medicine man told the assembled warriors that the Great Spirit had said that they would be victorious; that they would exterminate the buffalo hunters and suffer no material loss in numbers. To make his medicine more effective he announced that he would ride to the top of a near-by cliff and there commune once more with the Great Spirit. And so he did. Just as he reached the top of the cliff, Billy Dixon, who had sneaked outside the sod house which was Adobe Walls to reconnoitre, saw the savage silhouetted against the skyline. Quickly dropping to one knee, Dixon took a quick aim and fired. The medicine man of the Comanches dropped from his horse, shot through the heart at a distance of twelve hundred yards. Though his prophecy was fulfilled, and he really held communion with the Great Spirit in deed as well as word, nevertheless his cronies did not like the quick taking off, and therefore fought but half-heartedly.

Mrs. W. T. Coble, a long-time resident of the district in which the site of Adobe Walls is situated, had a conversation with Lone Wolf, the war chief of the attacking party previous to the battle, in which the latter stated his purpose of attacking the party of buffalo hunters and exterminating them, for the preservation of the buffalo in that region. The other chiefs in the Comanche forces at this battle were Satank, Big Tree, Little Raven and Satanta.

Adobe Walls is situated on the old Turkey Track cattle ranch, which now belongs to Tom Coble. Billy Dixon died in Cimarron County, Oklahoma, in 1913, and was buried in Texline, near the border of Texas and Oklahoma.

Three of the buffalo hunters were killed in the Adobe Walls fight, the two Shadler brothers and Billy Taylor, who lie buried on the battlefield.



Author of "North of Watling," "Footfalls in the Night," etc.

BERGEN, the fat man with the bloated face and the eyes like a pig's, was dead. A short, broad-bladed seaman's knife had been slipped between his ribs, and he had died quickly. He lay below now, wrapped in a sheet, and tomorrow morning he would be tilted into the sea while Captain Willis, in his clear, precise manner, read the burial service. Then the three-masted schooner *Thomas W. Ryan*, six days west of Gibraltar, *en route* from Marseilles to New York, would resume her way across the rolling Atlantic.

It was funny about Bergen's death. The locked door, for instance. And the knife. And the line over the side. Young Jimmy Martin, the second mate, pondered the matter as he paced the poop in the darkness beneath the stars. Queer, too, how it had happened close upon what Jimmy had said the day before at mess:

"I don't care what you say, a trade or a profession always leaves a man with certain traits. If a man is by trade a carpenter, he gets into the habit of doing things in the way that only a carpenter would do them. If he is an M. D., he has traits and habits peculiar to the medical profession. The same applies to lawyers, mechanics, soldiers, tailors, and—and yes, to officers of ships, and deck-hands. When a man follows a trade or profession for a certain length of time, he acquires the traits, both mental and physical, peculiar to that trade or profession, and thereafter he can not do a thing without betraying his calling—that is, to any one who has the necessary knowledge to read the signs."

The others at the table had exchanged amused glances at this, and Bergen, the fat man, coarse and blunt, had laughed outright. Captain Willis, squat, powerful, sitting at the end of the table, dropped his eyes to his plate and thoughtfully stirred his coffee.

"But some men have no trades, mister," he said in his slow way, seeming to weigh every word before letting it out.

"All men have trades, Cap'n," contradicted Jimmy. "I use the word 'trade' as a general term. A man may be a loafer or a laborer or a spendthrift or an athlete or a gambler or speculator, but he has a trade in the way I mean it. If he's a loafer, he has the traits of a loafer, and so on."

Bergen laughed again, and even sullen Mason, the supercargo, chuckled. Jimmy Martin was a droll one! It was said that he read and thought more than was good for him. Captain Willis studied his plate for a moment, then looked up, a thin smile on his lips.

"Do you mean," he asked, "that if a

carpenter, say, commits a murder, he does it with a saw and hatchet?"

Jimmy waited for Bergen's guffaw to end, then shook his head.

"No, I don't mean that, Cap'n."

"Then what do you mean?"

"I mean that if a carpenter committed a crime he would leave clues that only a carpenter would leave. Perhaps we wouldn't be able to see the clues or perhaps we wouldn't be able to recognize them if we did see them, but they'd be there, nevertheless. It is my opinion that if the police would study and catalog the traits of the different professions, they would be able to cut down the number of unsolved crimes. They've already reached the point where they can usually tell if a robbery is committed by experienced robbers or not. In time they'll be able to say, 'This safe was cracked by an amateur. By trade he is a plumber. See the manner in which he used his torch to burn around the tumblers.' That's a broad case, of course, but you see what I mean."

At this moment Mr. Rider, the chief mate, stepped into the cabin. For some minutes he had been listening at the foot of the companionway, having come down from the poop to get his sextant from the rack in the cabin.

"I know one thing," he growled. "I can darn near always tell whether a job o' work has been done by a sailorman or not."

"That's what I mean!" cried Jimmy. "And I'll bet you that a boss carpenter can always tell whether or not a job has been done by a carpenter."

"Maybe you are right, Mister," said Captain Willis slowly.

"He's coo-coo, if you ask me," scoffed Bergen, and the surly supercargo nodded.

TWELVE hours later they found Bergen stabbed to death in his room. The cabin-boy had tried to arouse him for breakfast, but failing, had notified the captain. Bergen's door was locked, but the carpenter opened it with a pass-key. Entering, they found the fat man on the floor with a knife between his ribs. There was but one door to the room and one port, the latter open. The door key hung on a nail some eight feet from the open port, which was let into the side of the vessel and looked out upon the sea.

Apparently it was Jimmy Martin who first recovered his wits. He looked about at the others. Captain Willis was staring narrow-eyed at the open port. Mason, the supercargo, pale-faced, thin but wiry, was watching the captain as if expecting him to explain it all with a word. Old "Chips," the carpenter, emaciated and bent, was gazing with morbid curiosity at the dead man on the floor.

"Here's a mystery!" exclaimed Jimmy. "The door locked and the key hanging on a nail inside the room! And no other way to get in the room except that port, which is so small that—that—well, darn few men could get through it. He must have come in through that port, and—and it seems to me it ought to be easy enough to find the man so small—"

He left off. A faint smile had flickered for an instant on the stocky captain's face, and it seemed to Jimmy that the other was laughing inwardly at him.

"Suppose he came in the same way we did —with a pass-key?" Captain Willis murmured softly.

The ancient carpenter shook his head vehemently at this.

"No, he didn't, Cap'n, beggin' yer pardon, sir. There ain't no pass-key but the one what I got in my pocket, and it ain't been out o' my pocket since yestiday noon. I was up all last night workin' on that there after pump, sir, and the key was in my pocket all the time. And there ain't no other key aboard to fit this lock. I been in this schooner six year, sir, and there ain't never been no key to fit this door but that one there on the nail and the one I got in my pocket. I'm certain o' that, sir."

Jimmy turned this over in his mind. He knew old Chips well; had known him, in fact, for years. Chips was a kindly, garrulous old fellow who wouldn't hurt a fly.

Captain Willis was on his knees beside the body. He arose slowly and spoke to Jimmy—.

"He's been dead for some time—for hours."

"Killed last night or early this morning," supplemented Jimmy. "But how did the murderer get in and out?"

"Must 'a' been suicide," suggested Chips.

"Men don't stab themselves like that when they commit suicide," objected Jimmy. "They usually cut their throats. It's quicker and easier. No, it wasn't suicide. Somebody killed him, and whoever it

was, he came through that port. There's no other way."

Captain Willis nodded slowly. He was a strange man, Captain Willis. It was said that in thirty years at sea he had never made a mistake worthy of mention. He was cautious and calculating, and never made a move without first reasoning out what the probable result would be. He was a man to wait for tides and take early soundings, was this calm, cool sea captain. Now he was sizing things up and laying out a course.

"The port seems to be the answer," he agreed at last. "And just as you say, Mister, he must have been a narrow-beamed one to squirm through that."

He went to the port and put out his head, tried in vain to squeeze his bulky shoulders through the brass-bound circle. Obviously it was impossible. He suddenly drew back, then put out his hand and drew in a rope-end fashioned into a bowline and two half-hitches. The other end of the line was apparently made fast on the poop above.

"Here we are!" said the captain triumphantly. "He slid down this line till his feet were in the bowl'n, then wiggled himself through the port."

Jimmy inspected the rope end with a puzzled frown.

"A bowl'n and two-hitches," he mused. "Why the half-hitches? Wasn't the bowl'n alone enough for him?"

The captain cast him a quick glance.

"Well?"

"It's funny," muttered Jimmy.

Captain Willis smiled thinly.

"Trying out your theory, are you? Well, go to it, Mister. You have my permission. I'm not a detective, and if you can find the man who did this, I'll thank you. You may have the right idea after all."

Jimmy was prowling about the room.

"He cleaned up well before he left," he said, stopping to inspect a reddish smudge on the paint beneath the port. "Here's where he wiped some finger marks off the paint. There's another spot on the side of the bunk. He wasn't a fool, this fellow. And he was a cool one, too! This knife, now—"

He picked up the knife which the captain had drawn from the body and placed on the transom seat.

"He even wiped the handle of the knife before he left."

Old Chips here had a pertinent question to ask.

"Beggin' your pardon, sir, why didn't he throw the darn thing out the port, 'stead o' wipin' it off?"

"You've got me stuck on that one, Chips," answered Jimmy frankly. "I don't know why he didn't toss it out the port, but I do know he wiped the handle off with a bit of rag. I can see the way he smeared the blood as he wiped. It's a seaman's knife, the kind they buy in the water front shops, though according to law it ought to have a blunt blade. But there's more than one just like this aboard. Yes, it's a seaman's knife—"

He broke off suddenly as he absently tried the knife's edge with his thumb.

"What now, Mister?" inquired the captain.

"Something funny—funny!" muttered Jimmy. "I—wait a minute!"

HE STOOD for a moment, staring at the knife, then looked at the rope-end, still hanging through the port. Then he put his head on one side and pondered deeply, then looked from one to the other of those in the room and at the port.

"Strike something?" asked Captain Willis, coming to his side.

"I think so, sir." There was a tremor of excitement in Jimmy's voice. "I think I've got it! I'd like to see you alone, Cap'n."

"Certainly. After breakfast, Mister, and after I work my morning sight come to my room. We'll sift this thing and clap this killer, whoever he is, in irons."

Jimmy was very thoughtful at breakfast. He was thinking about Bergen, who was now no more. He had never liked Bergen; the man had been frankly loose-moraled, and Jimmy suspected that at heart he had been a crook. Jimmy didn't quite understand the fat man's connection with the schooner; for while technically a member of the crew, Bergen had actually been a passenger.

Bergen had joined the ship in Marseilles. He strode up the gangplank and held out a pudgy hand to Jimmy, standing at the top.

"I'm Bergen. You remember me, Second Mate. I'm a friend of the cap'n's. I met you in Liverpool once, and again in Cette and Bordeaux. Remember?"

"Yes. How are you?" returned Jimmy,

taking the other's hand, which had the cold, moist lifelessness of a dead fish.

"I'm sailing with you for N' Yawk," Bergen informed him. "I got permission from the American consul."

"That's good." Jimmy's pleasure was not too pronounced, however. "But have you seen Cap'n Willis? You have to get his permission, you know. This isn't a passenger vessel."

"I know. But don't worry, Second Mate. The cap'n won't object. I can't go with you as passenger, but the consul says it'll be all right if the cap'n wants to sign me on as one of the crew at a cent a month. That's to cover the law."

"I don't think the Old Man will do it. He's a stickler for following the rules, you know."

"I know. But he'll make an exception for me." Bergen's manner was very sure. "When I tell him I want to sail home with him he'll sign me in a minute. You'll see. Willis and me are good friends."

For some reason not clear to Jimmy, Bergen laughed.

And it came about as Bergen had said it would. The fat man and Captain Willis had quite a lengthy talk in the latter's room, then the captain came out and told the mate that Bergen was to be signed on the vessel's articles as assistant steward.

This arrangement is nothing unusual in freight ships, but the captain's consenting to it greatly surprized Jimmy. Captain Willis knew maritime laws to the last letter, and it was his wont to live up to them to the final agree. "Safety first" was a watchword with the captain, and he lived up to it in everything; it was not like him to leave himself open to even a hint that he was evading the law on a technicality.

However, the arrangement stood, and Bergen sailed as assistant steward in the *Thomas W. Ryan*. He lived a life of ease—eating, sleeping, and lolling in a deck-chair on the poop and, quite frequently, playing draw poker with the captain and the supercargo. Incidentally, it seems that Bergen had known the surly supercargo for years. This poker playing furnished Jimmy with matter for much quiet speculation.

Bergen won steadily, and just as steadily, Mason, the supercargo, lost. Each day the stakes were higher and the playing more intense, and each day Mason was more sullen. He grew snarly and resentful, and once he leaned across the table and would have driven his skinny fist to the fat man's face had not Captain Willis put out a restraining hand. The captain, Jimmy noticed, seemed to be holding his own. He "played 'em close to his stomach," thoughtfully, conservatively, as was his way, and took no chances if he could possibly avoid it. His face was always expressionless, and he seldom spoke, never above a murmur, and he played like an automaton.

After a particularly bad session one forenoon, Mason jumped to his feet and flung his cards into Bergen's face.

"You fat slob," he snarled, "you've been flimflamming me, and you know it and I know it, but I couldn't catch you at it. Now I'm through! I'm fourteen hundred bucks to the bad, and I know when I've got enough punishment. You're a crook, Bergen, and I'll get you yet!"

The accusation slid off Bergen like rain off a good Cape Cod oilskin.

"Deal 'em around," he said, "and maybe you can get me now."

"I don't mean that way." Mason's thin body shook with fury. "I'll get you in my own way, and in my own time, you big grease-ball!"

"Don't be a fool," retorted Bergen, and laughed in the supercargo's anger-twisted face. "Be a good loser."

"See if you can be a good loser when your time comes!" gritted Mason, and flung out of the cabin.

CAPTAIN WILLIS was calmly counting his chips. Finished, he shoved them across to Bergen and cashed in, then rose and strolled to the companionway, coolly lighting a cigar as he went. Nothing ever ruffled Captain Willis; he was always prepared for whatever might happen.

And thus had ended the poker playing on the morning before Bergen had been found murdered.

Instead of waiting for Jimmy to come to him, the captain came to the poop while the second mate was on watch. He motioned Jimmy to come out of hearing of the man at the wheel and led the way to the taffrail, stopped beside the whirring patent log and leaned on the rail. The big three-master, with a quartering wind, was sliding through the long gray swells like a thing alive. Captain Willis' gaze was on a gull that whirled

and planed overhead as he asked Jimmy what it was that he wanted to say.

"I suppose you suspect some one?"

"Yes, sir," Jimmy nodded. "We know for certain that Bergen was murdered, because a man doesn't go around and wipe up blood stains and finger prints after he's killed himself."

"I don't recall ever hearing of a suicide doing that," murmured the captain, smiling at the planing gull.

"Bergen was murdered, then, and the murderer must have come in through that port. The door was locked and the key inside the room. The only other key that fits the door was in Chips' pocket, and he says it was there all night. I believe him."

"So do I," assented the captain.

"Then the thing to do is to find the man who came through that port. Only a very, very thin man could do that, and there is only one man aboard thin enough to answer the description—that is, if we except old Chips, and he's so old and crippled with rheumatism that he couldn't get over the side and wriggle through that port if his life depended on it. There's only one man with the build and strength to do it."

"I'm following you, Mister. I know who you have in mind, and I'm thinking the same as you are."

"Yes, sir. And it was only the day before that he threatened to get Bergen. There's the motive."

"That's right."

"But that's not all the evidence." Jimmy took from his pocket the knife with which Bergen had been stabbed. "Here's the knife. Did you notice how sharp it is?"

"Well, no, I didn't. It's a regular seaman's knife—"

"Yes," broke in Jimmy, "but it didn't belong to a seaman! This knife has an edge like a razor. It's been sharpened on an oilstone till you could shave yourself with it. Did you ever know a seaman to sharpen the big blade in his jack-knife like that?"

"That's right, Mister!" Captain Willis nodded approvingly. "You are a smart one!"

"A seaman keeps the big blade of his knife to cut rope with, and you can't cut rope with a razor edge. This knife is too sharp to cut rope with. To cut rope well a knife must have a rough, coarse edge, and seamen sharpen their knives on a rough grindstone. You couldn't cut through an eight-inch line in a week with this knife. It's too sharp."

"You're right, Mister, you're right. And this fellow we're talking about is not a seaman."

"No, sir, he isn't. And he's the only man aboard who isn't a seaman. Even the cook and the steward and the cabin-boy have served time on deck and are seamen of sorts."

"That's right. Go on."

"Then there's that rope-end with the bowl'n and the two half-hitches in it. No seaman ever put a knot like that in a line. A seaman would have been satisfied with the bowl'n alone, because any seaman knows that a bowl'n will hold till the line parts. But the man who made that knot knew just enough to make a bowl'n but not enough to have perfect confidence in it. When he looked overside and saw the black water rushing beneath he got scared and lost confidence in the bowl'n, so he threw a couple of half-hitches on top of it to make sure. That's a landsman trick, to put three knots in a line when one will serve."

"I never thought of that," murmured Captain Willis, looking astern at the foaming wake, "but you're right, you're right!"

"Then we're looking for a skinny landsman who is young and strong enough to slide over the side and wriggle through that port. There's only one landsman aboard, and one skinny man aboard, and that landsman and that skinny man are one and the same! Besides, we have a motive and a threat."

"Mister, you should have been a detective instead of a sailor." A vague emotion flickered for an instant on the captain's face as he glanced at Jimmy then away. "You should have been a detective."

Jimmy looked at him doubtfully.

"Cap'n, you're not laughing at me, are you?"

"Laughing at you?" He shook his head slowly. "Why, no, son. I admire your logic. You're working on the theory that every man has the traits of his profession, aren't you? Well, you know I said the other day that I thought you might be right."

"That you did, sir," said Jimmy, completely mollified. "And now, Cap'n, before we let the steward into the room to fix up the body for burial, don't you think we ought to look around for the fourteen hundred dollars Bergen won from Mason? Or

shall I place Mason under arrest right away?"

Captain Willis remained silent, thinking, his gaze on the distant horizon. A little bird, exhausted and looking for rest, fluttered down from the sky and alighted on the end of the mizzen boom. The schooner rolled slowly, and the boom, bringing up on the sheet-tackle, sent the little bird spinning into the air. It missed the sheet and, too weak to fly, landed on the deck at the captain's feet. Absently the stony-faced man put out a foot and crushed the bird beneath his heel, then, with hardly a glance, he kicked the lifeless little body into the waterway.

"Perhaps we had better place Mason officially under arrest—" he began. Then, "What's wrong with you?"

Jimmy was standing aghast.

"Why—why, the way you killed that poor, tired bird! It was the most cold-blooded thing I ever saw!"

"Oh, that!" The captain's thin lips twisted into a faint smile. "It's the fate of the weak to go under," he said as one who is speaking to a child. "That big old gull up there now, you don't see him being crushed beneath any one's heel."

"But—but that poor little bird, tired and maybe sick—"

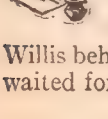
"Nonsense. We're talking about a killer who is loose aboard this vessel, not about a bird.

"Go clap the irons on Mason. There's no chance, of course, of him escaping, but he might take it into his head to go over the side. I think he's the kind that would commit suicide rather than go to the chair, and we've had casualties enough. Or better still, Mister, send Mason to me without telling him what he's wanted for."

"And we'll search Bergen's room for the money?"

"Yes, we'll do that immediately."

With a word to the helmsman to keep his eyes open and sing out if he needed him, Jimmy followed Captain Willis below. In the cabin, the captain motioned Jimmy to precede him to the supercargo's room.



MASON was at his desk, working away at a stack of manifests. He looked up with his habitual scowl as Jimmy, with Captain Willis behind him, entered the room. Jimmy waited for the captain to speak, but as the latter said nothing, he took it upon himself to explain what they had come for.

Mason listened without comment or even show of surprize. As Jimmy talked, Mason was looking past him, seemingly at the captain. Jimmy turned suddenly upon the captain, but the latter was gazing unseeingly at the partition beyond Mason.

"So I'm the man who stuck the knife in Bergen, am I?" muttered Mason as Jimmy finished. "And I'm under arrest? Well—" He glanced at Captain Willis, then nodded and scowled. "And you're going to put the irons on me? At sea? Is that regular? Are you afraid that I'll sprout wings and fly off?"

Captain Willis seemed to have made a decision.

"You needn't iron him, Mister Martin," he said after a moment of hesitation. "And you, Mason, you're confined to your room till we reach Sandy Hook, then I'll put you in irons. I'm not going to lock you in your room in the meanwhile, but I'll expect you to stay there."

Mason grunted something beneath his breath and turned his back upon them. They left Mason and went to the room that had been occupied by Bergen.

But they did not find the fourteen hundred dollars. After a thorough search of the room and the dead man's clothes, they turned up nineteen dollars and some silver; that was all.

"Looks like we were right," commented Jimmy as they finished. "Mason must have that money. Shall we search his room now, before he has a chance to do away with it?"

It was several minutes before Captain Willis answered, then he shook his head.

"No, not yet. Let us wait a while."

"But—"

"We'll wait, Mister."

"You're the boss, Cap'n."

They left the room and Captain Willis sent the cabin-boy to tell the steward to prepare the body for burial.

So it was that young Jimmy Martin pondered as he paced the poop that night. Despite all his reasoning and the conclusions drawn therefrom, he felt that there was an undercurrent flowing deep beneath it all, a current so deep and mysterious that he could not penetrate to it.

But what could be wrong with his reasoning? Nothing, so far as he could see. His

conclusions seemed all well founded. Who, for instance, was so slender yet so wiry that he could lower himself over the side and squirm through that port? A man who carries a jack-knife with a razor edge and ties two half-hitches above a bowline, to further secure it, is certainly not a seaman accustomed to working with rope. Who was the landsman aboard? Who had reason to murder Bergen? Who had threatened him in fact? To all these questions he could find but one answer—Mason. The description fitted Mason and no other, of all the men in that vessel. Each of these several clues was damning in itself, and each led straight to Mason, the surly supercargo.

Jimmy talked the matter over with Mr. Rider, the mate, when the latter came to relieve him at midnight. Mr. Rider was a big, bluff, elderly man who knew nothing of anything but seamanship, and of seamanship he knew about as much as it is possible for one man to know. He said he cared not a two-penny piece whether Mason murdered Bergen or vice versa; nevertheless, he was glad to have Jimmy's company on the poop, to while away some of the long, lonely watch, and the subject of conversation was of little moment.

"I never liked either of those stiffs," growled Mr. Rider, wrenching a man-size chew off a plug of black tobacco. "We didn't lose a —— of a lot when we lost that big card sharp. I used to stand behind him and see him slip cards in and out the deck right under Mason's eyes, but it wasn't any o' my business. Mason tried to cheat too, but he was too dumb, and Bergen only laughed and beat him at his own game. I don't know who started it. I kind o' think the cap'n was playing trick poker too, but I didn't see him at his. The Old Man's got eyes in the back of his head, and he always knows it, seems like, when you're looking at him. He knows his way about, does Cap'n Willis. He knew that Bergen too long to let him slip anything over."

"I was wondering about that," said Jimmy. "How did they come to get acquainted?"

"Don't you know? Why, Cap'n Willis used to be master o' the S.S. *Maryland*, a fine big liner runnin' between New York and Frisco. Bergen was purser and Mason was assistant purser."

"Mason, too!"

"Sure. They were all three together in the *Maryland*. Willis had a fine job there."

"Why did he quit?"

"Didn't quit, or so I hear."

"Fired, you mean? Why?"

"Well—" Mr. Rider scratched his head to bring back half forgotten memories—"I don't remember all of it, but seems to me they had some trouble with the accounts—repair bills, stores, or some such thing. The company couldn't prove anything on him, I guess, so they asked him to resign. Bergen and Mason got fired a couple o' trips later for fooling around with the women passengers. Willis had this schooner by then—a come-down for him, I tell you—and Mason hooked up with him as supercargo. Ever since then we been running into Bergen in most every port we hit. He used to come aboard and hang around with Willis long before you came here."

"That's all news to me. I was wondering how they got acquainted."

"Well, they won't be acquainted much longer," growled Mr. Rider. "Bergen is dead and Mason is on his way to the chair or the pen, according to the way they look at that evidence of yours."

"How does it look to you?"

"Me? I ain't thinking much about it. I'm not a detective, and I'm glad the cap'n don't expect me to go hunting for clues. Still, from what I know of it and from what you tell me, I'd say you had Mason nailed to the mast. Looks like a sure thing to me. Seems to me impossible that it was any one else."

"That's the way it looks to me. It must have happened between eleven o'clock and eight bells last night, while I was for'rd getting those jibs straightened out. It took me over an hour. Even if I'd been standing here on the poop I'd hardly have seen him. That cabin skylight is in the way, and then there's that work boat nested there and the companionway hood. There could be a half dozen men over there and you wouldn't be able to see them unless you walked around the boat. He just came up the companionway, made his line fast and went over. Last night was dark as the inside of a hat anyway. Here, I'll show you how he did it."

"Go ahead," said Mr. Rider.

TOGETHER they went aft to the starboard quarter, beneath which was the room that had been occupied by Bergen. Jimmy caught up the end of a boat-fall, threw a bowline in it and dropped it over the side so that it hung where he judged the port to be. After making the bight of the line fast to a deck-cleat, he swung over the rail and went swiftly down the line. When his feet were in the bowline he hung there and felt about for the port, which he found was still open. His hand, when he put it in came in contact with a small roller shade, and he remembered that Bergen had grumbled about the shades not being in working order. The carpenter had repaired the shade in response to Bergen's complaint, so that the latter could sleep late and not be disturbed by the morning sunlight.

The murder had occurred at night, mused Jimmy, and the shade must have been down, and the port open for ventilation. He wanted to see the thing as it had been, so he reached in and pulled down the shade, which was of white holland. As he hung there musing, hardly knowing what he was looking for, it occurred to him that the murderer might have left marks of some sort on the vessel's side, and he took a box of matches from his pocket and struck one. The match flared up, and he found himself face to face with something that so startled him that he almost lost his grip of the rope he was clinging to with one hand.

He struck another match, and another. He had made an important discovery, and his heart was pounding as he stared at the thing before his eyes.

"What're you doing there, Martin?" Mr. Rider, looking down from above, was becoming impatient. "Come on up."

"Coming," answered Jimmy and, releasing the shade so that it rolled itself up on the roller, he went hand over hand up the line.

Mr. Rider looked aloft at the white sails standing out against the night and called a sharp warning to the helmsman, then turned back to Jimmy.

"So that's how the son-of-a-gun did it?"

"That's how." Jimmy hauled up the boat-fall and coiled it down on its grating, then straightened. "I'm getting sleepy, I guess," he said. "Good night."

And he went below.

But Jimmy didn't sleep much that night. He lay awake for a long time, thinking, thinking; and even when he finally did fall asleep, keen-edged seamen's knives and bloody fingerprints chased one another through his dreams.

After breakfast the crew were assembled in the lee of the midship deckhouse for Bergen's burial.

"And the body shall be cast into the sea."

And so it was. It slid with a slight splash into the sunlit blue water and was gone.

Jimmy took advantage of the opportunity to pass around the knife with which Bergen had been killed, asking if any one of them remembered seeing it before. They passed the weapon from hand to hand, and one by one shook their heads in negative answer, till at last the knife came to a big Curasal negro who, after a half-minute's study, nodded vigorously.

"Dis yere sticker used to b'long to me, sah," he informed Jimmy. "One time de supercargo he come to me and say he wanta buy it, and Ah give it to 'im for one buck. Ah knows dis knife well, sah, 'cause der's a burned place on de handle where Ah dropped it in de galley stove when Ah was—was—"

"Stealin' chow," another seaman finished for him.

Jimmy suggested that Mason be brought to confront the negro, and Captain Willis, after some thought, assented. Mr. Rider sent the steward for the supercargo.

"That's a —— lie!" snarled Mason when he was told what the negro had said.

"Supercargo, sah," answered the black man, "yo wouldn't call me a liah if yo was a sailorman on deck wi' me. Ah ain't no liah, sah!"

"Billy Bings is right, sir." The boatswain, a burly, bearded man, came forward. "I remember when he sold that knife to the supercargo. He said 'e wanted it to sharpen pencils and cut paper with."

"It's a lie!" repeated Mason.

"Supercargo, yo know in yo heart it ain't me what's lyin'," said the Curasal. "Yo know yo purchased dat dere sticker from me, sah."

Mason started to retort, but glanced once at Captain Willis and clamped his teeth together. Not another word could they get out of him, except that he was heard to mutter something about a white man's word against a nigger's.

Now old Chips came forward.

"And about two-three weeks ago," he said, "he borried a oil-stone from me to sharpen dis dang knife with, and I ain't got it back yet. Just come to think of it."

Mason started and a puzzled look came to his thin face, but he shook his head and remained silent.

The crew was dismissed, Mason sent to his room and Jimmy and Captain Willis returned to the poop.

"You know, Cap'n," said Jimmy, "I'm glad you let me follow this thing up. It has given me a chance to try out some of my theories."

"And the more you find out, the guiltier Mason seems to be. Isn't that so?"

"That's right, Cap'n. But there are a few things about it I don't quite understand yet. But I guess they'll work themselves out."

"Go right ahead, Mister, and find out all you can."

THAT afternoon Jimmy, armed with a magnifying lens from his binoculars, went to the room in which the murder had been committed. There was something about the case that still puzzled him, and he was determined to clear it up if possible. He locked the door behind him and then pulled down the roller shade set in brackets above the port. Then he took out his magnifying glass and closely inspected that which had so startled him the night before.

Yes, they were still there—four bloody finger-prints on the outer side of the white holland shade. And now he found another one, a thumb-print, on the inner side of the shade. When the killer had released the shade, his bloody finger-tips had left their signatures. When the shade was rolled up the finger-prints could not be seen; thus the killer had missed them when he so carefully wiped away the other identifying marks in the room.

Jimmy looked down at the dark stain on the pine floor where Bergen had been found. It seemed strange to him that there had been so much blood.

"When a man is stabbed and the knife is left in the wound," he reasoned, "it seems to me that that would kind of stop the flow of blood. Of course he would bleed some, but it seems funny to me that Bergen bled as much as he did. I may be wrong and I may not. I wish I could talk to some doctor about it."

He was off on an entirely new track now. He discarded all his previously gathered evidence and built up a theory which was contradictory in every way to his first conclusions. He knew hardly anything at all of the science of fingerprint identification, and would not have presumed for a moment to identify the owner of those on the shade. Nevertheless, those five tell-tale marks were the cause of his present perplexity. Instead of promising to strengthen his case, they threatened to tear it down completely or at least cause him to greatly revise it.

Beneath the port there was a cushioned settee or transom, and it struck Jimmy that a man climbing in through the port would certainly leave some sort of a mark on the cushion. He searched the leather cushion with his glass, but not the slightest mark of a shoe could he find.

"Now how the dickens could a man stand on that cushion and not leave some sort of a mark?" he mused. "It seems to me it's impossible."

While he stood puzzling over it a thought came to him, and he crossed the room to the nail upon which the door key had been hanging when they entered the room the day before. The nail was a rusty, square-cut iron nail, and through the lens Jimmy saw several pieces of fine cotton lint attached to the rough surface. He wondered if that lint was not from a piece of sail-twine which had perhaps recently been made fast to the nail. If a piece of sail-twine had been made fast to that nail, then his new line of reasoning promised well indeed.

He left the room, and going forward, found Chips in his little shop under the forecastle-head.

"Chips, could you pick that lock on Bergen's door?"

"No, sir!" Chips shook his head vigorously. "And neither could anybody else. I been foolin' around with locks for over thirty year, ever since I been a ship's carpenter, and I tell you nobody could pick that lock."

"Why not?"

"It works too stiff, that's why. Mr. Rider came aboard in Marseilles feelin' pretty good, and he got mixed up and tried to get in that room instead of his own.

This was before that fellow Bergen came to the ship. The door was locked, and Mr. Rider hit it with his shoulder and smashed the lock. I fixed it the same time I fixed the shade in the room, 'cause Bergen said he wanted to lock his door at night, and I had to put in a new tumbler. It was different from the other and worked stiff. I had to change the key to fit it and had to cut a little notch in my pass-key."

"And you only made one key?"

"Yes, sir. That door was locked with that key you found hangin' on the nail, and no other. That's sure, Mr. Martin, and I'd bet my life on it."

From Chips Jimmy went to Mason.

"Let me see your finger-tips, Mason," he said.

"What for?"

"Never mind. Let me see 'em, or I'll call a couple of men in to hold you while I look."

"Look at 'em, then, Sherlock," sneered the supercargo, and held out both hands.

For several minutes Jimmy studied the other's finger ends through his lens, then he straightened and grinned at Mason.

"Now tell me about that knife."

"What knife?" growled Mason.

"The knife you bought from Billy Bings."

"That's a —— lie, I tell you."

"It's not a lie, and you and I both know it. Tell me about it."

"Beat it. You make me sick."

"You may be sorry if you don't tell me."

MASON wavered.

"Say, listen, Martin, I'm as much in the dark about this thing as you are. There's a lot you don't know and a lot I don't know. I'm layin' low and sayin' nothin'. I don't know what it's all about and I'm goin' to keep quiet till I find out."

"You'd better tell me about that knife."

"I don't know anything about it. I did buy the —— thing from that nigger, yes, but you don't blame me for lying about it, do you? And if you tell anybody what I'm tellin' you I'll lie again—say I never said it. Do you get me? All I know is, I bought the knife and borrowed a stone from Chips to sharpen it with. It had an edge like a saw, and tore the paper instead of cutting it. But I didn't sharpen it like it was when you showed it to me after Willis pulled it out of Bergen. Somebody else did that. I only gave it a coupla licks across the stone to take off the rough edge."

"How did it get out of your hands?"

"That's what I can't figure out. The knife and the stone were right here on top of my desk the night Bergen was killed. At least they were there when I turned in at ten o'clock."

"Do you ever lock your door?"

"Naw. What for?"

"How long had the knife been on top of your desk?"

"I always kept it there."

"That's all I wanted to know," said Jimmy, and left the room.

That night at eight bells, when Mr. Rider came to take over the watch, Jimmy asked him a question.

"Captain Willis and Bergen were pretty friendly, weren't they? How do you suppose they came to be such good friends?"

"Friends?" Mr. Rider squinted aloft and called a warning to the helmsman before he answered. "I don't know as they were what you'd call good friends. I guess they knew each other pretty good though."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, as I told you, they were mixed up together in some crooked deal, when they were in the *Maryland*. Mason was in it too, I remember. Still it was only focsle talk and maybe there wasn't anything to it. I dunno. But look how quick Willis did what Bergen wanted him to in Marseilles, signed him on and all that. I guess there was something between 'em all right. Anyway, it ain't none o' my business. What're you worryin' about it for?"

"I'm not worrying," answered Jimmy, grinning. I'm just playing detective."

"You been readin' too much detective trash. It ain't good for a man to read too much, anyway."

"I read good books," said Jimmy proudly. "Lately I've been reading Poe, Doyle and Gaboriau."

"Yeh?" snorted Mr. Rider. "Who are them stiffs—gumshoes? They'd better be out catching crooks 'stead o' writing stories about 'em. Some o' these stiffs—hey, where you goin'? You ain't sore, are you?"

"Oh, no. I'm sleepy, that's all, and I'm going to turn in. Good night."

"He's a good boy, but kind o' nutty," muttered Mr. Rider as Jimmy disappeared below.

Ten days later the schooner raised Navesink light and stood off and on till morning, then ran in and anchored off the Hook to wait for a tug. Jimmy, at the captain's order, went below and handcuffed Mason to a stanchion in the cabin to prevent his escape by swimming ashore.

"He'll stay put," said Jimmy, reporting back to Captain Willis.

"Put them on proper, did you?"

"Yes, sir. Here is the key."

The captain took the key and absently dropped it into his pocket.

That afternoon there came a tug, and the *Thomas W. Ryan* was towed up Ambrose Channel and anchored at Quarantine, arriving too late, however, for the granting of pratique. They would have to wait till passed by the Quarantine doctor before proceeding to the schooner's regular dock in Brooklyn.

Captain Willis had sent word by the tug master that a murderer was being held aboard, and next morning a New York plain clothes man came to the schooner in the Quarantine tug with the doctor. Mr. Rider, grinning, met him at the rail.

"I'm after that fellow you got chained up here," said the detective, and showed a badge.

Mr. Rider's grin broadened.

"You'll have to travel some to get him," he chuckled. "He got away."

"Got away!" The detective s w o r e. "When?"

"Some time during the night. Just slipped out a port and swam ashore, I guess. He's probably hittin' the high spots now. I wasn't below from midnight to six this morning, and he got away during that time. Probably in Jersey by now."

"But I thought you had him handcuffed?"

"Did, but he slipped out of 'em and left 'em hangin' to the stanchion. Come on and I'll show you."

IN THE cabin, the detective looked at the handcuffs, both wristlets of which were still locked, one about the stanchion and the other empty. The detective—Jenkins, he said his name was—took the empty cuff in his hand and looked at it unbelievingly.

"So this guy Mason is skinny, is he? He must be skinny, to slip out of that!"

"He did, just the same," said Captain Willis, who with Jimmy, had come down the companion-ladder. "I know he slipped it because I had the key in my pocket all the time."

"I guess that settles it, then." The detective nodded glumly.

"I feel like it was my fault," put in Jimmy. "Maybe I didn't put them on tight enough."

"You couldn't get 'em any tighter; they're up to the last notch," said Jenkins.

"Never mind, Mr. Martin," said Captain Willis comfortingly to Jimmy. "If he got away, he got away, that's all there is to it. Don't you worry about it. You did the best you could to bring him to justice. If it hadn't been for you, we probably wouldn't have known who it was that committed the murder. It was you who picked up all the clues and solved the thing."

"Well—" Jenkins looked about at them— "I'll get the facts from you and make a few notes and beat it."

"Mr. Martin here will tell you all there is to be told," said the captain. He turned to Jimmy. "You go with the officer and show him everything, Mr. Martin."

"Yes, sir," said Jimmy, and led the detective toward the murder room.

They spent a good hour there, Jimmy talking in a low voice and Jenkins listening interestedly, and at the end the latter slapped Jimmy heartily on the back.

"Young fellow, when I first saw you and heard how you let that bird get away, I thought you were a —— fool, but I take it all back. Your idea is first rate, and I'm going to carry it out just as you suggest. You've got a head on your shoulders, buddy. Make up your package, now."

Jimmy left the room and returned in a minute with two articles and a sheet of newspaper in his hand. One of the articles was a common bone comb and the other was a worn southwester. He spread the newspaper on the berth and placed the comb and the oilskin hat upon it.

"The southwester," he said in a guarded voice, "belongs to Cap'n Willis and the comb is Mason's. You'd better make a note of it."

He went to the port and slipped the roller shade off its brackets and, returning to the berth, wrapped the shade, the comb, and the southwester in the paper, making a small, compact package, which he gave to Jenkins.

"I'll see you in Brooklyn," said Jenkins, and they went together to the poop, where the detective signaled for a boat.

When he had gone Captain Willis beckoned to Jimmy.

"What was in that bundle that fellow took off the ship with him, Mister?"

"Just some silk stuff I bought in France for my girl. Jenkins is a good fellow and he's taking it ashore so I won't have to pay duty on it. He lives near me in Brooklyn and I'm going to go to his house for it when I get ashore."

"I don't like that!" snapped the captain. "An officer of a vessel and a detective conspiring together to evade the law! I don't like it, Mister! I didn't notice the package till he was in the boat or I'd have stopped him. We'll let it go this time, but never try any such thing again."

He swung about and strode off.

"You oughta known better," reproved Mr. Rider, shaking his head at Jimmy. 'Shouldn't have let him see you, anyway."

"I—I didn't think," muttered Jimmy, looking away.

"You read too blame much. How can a man think when his head's chock full o' book stuff?"

"Well—I—"

But Mr. Rider stamped off forward, leaving Jimmy alone on the poop, and grinning!

By noon the schooner was in her dock in Brooklyn, but Jenkins did not make his appearance till late in the afternoon. Mr. Rider had gone ashore and Captain Willis was on the poop in his shore clothes when the detective came up the gangplank.

"How about it?" asked Jimmy.

"You were right, according to that hat and that comb, though the identification will have to be verified later. Well, let's get it over with."

Jimmy led the way to Captain Willis, Jenkins, both hands in his pockets, following.

"Cap'n Willis," Jimmy said, "this gentleman has something that I think will interest you."

"Yes?" The captain's brows lifted as he turned slowly upon them. "Oh, the detective, eh? Well, my man, what have you that you think will interest me."

"I've got two things," said Jenkins firmly. "In one hand I've got a gun, and it's trained on your wishbone, and in the other hand I've got a warrant for your arrest!"

For once in his life Captain Willis found himself unprepared. He started violently, crouched as if to leap upon them, then straightened and turned half around as if dizzy.

"A—a warrant? For me?" he breathed.

"That's it. You're under arrest for murder, and anything you say will be used against you."

THE stocky captain see-sawed back and forth on his heels like a drunken man. He seemed hardly aware of what was happening when Jenkins reached out, and snapped a handcuff on his wrist.

"Why—why, this is all a mistake!" he murmured. "All a mistake."

"It's not a mistake at all, Cap'n Willis," put in Jimmy, "though I certainly do wish it was. The only mistake made was made by you, and that in spite of all your caution."

"I—I don't understand."

"You will, Cap'n. The mistake you made was in leaving your fingerprints on that shade when you rolled it up. I sent the shade and one of your southwesters to the police fingerprint experts this afternoon and they said the prints on the southwester were the same as those on the shade. I also sent Mason's comb to them, and they said Mason could not have made the prints on the shade. Isn't that it, Jenkins?"

"Right as right, Second Mate."

"So I know that the bloody prints on the shade were made by you."

"I see," said the captain weakly. "You mean that I killed Bergen? Why should I do that?"

"He knew about your past when you and he were together in the *Maryland*, and he was living off you by blackmail. That's why he always turned up in whatever port we were. Mason knew about it, too, and that's why he didn't get excited when we accused him of the murder. You probably made some sign to him to keep quiet that day in his room. This morning, some time after midnight, you released him and gave him money to make a getaway. I don't think he had anything to do with the murder, but I suppose he suspected you.

"You made a fool out of me in the beginning," Jimmy went on. "You knew what

my theory was about catching criminals by their traits, and you played it for all it was worth. You fooled me all right. You played your cards just right to make me think it was Mason, you figuring all the time to give Mason a chance to escape after I had him proven guilty. His escape would clear you all the more, and would do away with him for good.

"That knife stunt was clever, and just like you. You took Mason's knife from his desk, went to Bergen's room, got him to let you in and stabbed him—"

"No, no!" cried the captain. "I only threatened him at first, trying to frighten him, but he wrestled with me, and—and—"

He realized what he was saying and broke off.

"And then you stabbed him." Jimmy nodded firmly. "I know. Then when you saw what you had done, you began to plan. You pulled out the knife, sneaked the oilstone out of Mason's room and sharpened the knife blade to a razor edge. You figured that I was pretty shrewd but not too shrewd, and that I'd conclude that the knife belonged to a landsman, just as I did. I fell for it just as you thought I would. That was why you encouraged me to hunt for clues, and the clues I didn't find by myself you led me to. The line over the side, for instance.

"It was probably after you had sharpened the knife and put it back in the wound that you thought of making it appear as if a man of your build couldn't possibly have got into the room. You went to the port and rolled up the shade, and that's when you made the prints. And that's what started me off on a new line of reasoning. The fingerprints were on the outer side of the shade and the thumbprint on the inner side, so whoever rolled the shade up must have been in the room when he did it, otherwise the prints would have been reversed. Besides, if the murderer came in through the port, he would have rolled up the shade first, before the murder, not after. And if he had done it before the murder there wouldn't have been any bloody prints at all. You left the port open, wiped up all the fingerprints you saw around and went out, locking the door and taking the key with you—"

"But the key was on the nail," broke in Jenkins.

"Oh, yes I'm getting ahead of myself. Before he left the room he made a little trolley with sail-twine from the nail to the port so he could reach the end of the twine from outside. He made the twine fast to the nail with a half-hitch on the bight, what a landsman would call a slip-knot.

"Well, when he got to the poop, I was for'rd and wouldn't have been able to see him anyway, dark as it was. He went over behind that boat and put a line over the side, first putting a bowl'n in it and two half-hitches to give me another false lead. He slid down the line to the port, put the key on the sail-twine trolley and jiggled it over to the nail, then released the twine by jerking out the bight. That was simple and easy.

"And that's about all. I don't know what became of the fourteen hundred dollars. Probably the cap'n gave it to Mason. Did you, Cap'n?"

Captain Willis was himself again now. He looked tired but was perfectly controled.

"Bergen was a dirty blackmailer," he said at length. "I couldn't shake him off. I admit that I killed him, but it was in self defense. I tried for years to shake him off, but couldn't, and then I tried to scare him into leaving me alone. But he jumped me, and I let him have it. It was self-defense, and I'll stick to that."

He turned slowly and motioned to Jenkins.

"All right, Mr. Detective," he murmured, and smiled thinly at Jimmy.

"Just as you say, Mister," he said, "I thought you were shrewd, but you are shrewder than I thought you were. You're a regular Sherlock Holmes."

"I'm going below and read about Sherlock now," answered Jimmy.

And he did.

Author of "The Scout," "Hard Lines," etc.

"SERGEANT," said Constable Butterbaugh between bites of salt fish, "may I obtain your august and specific authorization and permission to use and employ a mount this soft summer evening for personal and private reasons—"

"What's Ed talking about?" Sergeant Chinnick inquired of the other men. "Pass me the pepper-sauce, Calgary."

"He wants a horse tonight," Corporal Babson interpreted. "Anyway, that's what I gather from that teeter-totter."

"Whaffor, Ed?" Chinnock asked innocently.

His broad wink to the other men was a signal that the supper-table gaff, which Constable "Calgary" Wilson had been angrily enduring for several minutes, should be switched to Butterbaugh, who had been one of the foremost in baiting Wilson. It appeared that Calgary had spent good money on a motorcycle that would not cycle unless it was being pushed.

Butterbaugh looked up and caught the wink. He knew exactly what it meant and what was coming. The fair name of Mary McClellan would be dragged into the conversation and linked with his in all the horse-jokes that jealous wit could invent to make a mortal writhe. Something had to be done and done quick to turn the flow of wit into another channel.

"I'm going down to Shingletown and get drunk," he threw out, more or less without thinking.

His maneuver worked beautifully. Mary McClellan was forgotten. An echo of mock astonishment passed around the board. They all knew he was joking, for Butterbaugh did not drink. He had no taste for high liquor of any sort, and could not carry a second glass without showing signs.

"Better let me go 'long, Ed," somebody advised. "I'll see you get home."

"Better watch out, Ed," another warned solemnly. "I hear there's a blind pig down Progress Pike. You want to hold your breath when you go past or you *will* get stewed."

And so on around the table.

"You fellows," Ed remarked, "you buzz worse than a bunch of bar-flies. To hear you talk, a man 'ud think you were red-nosed topers with bay-windows a man could play cards on. As a matter of unstuccoed fact, there isn't a fellow in this outfit that's been showed the way home in the last two years. Why, when a person merely announces his intentions of getting on a manly tear, it takes your breath."

"That's no way to get promoted, Ed," Wilson observed. "Except to the hoosegow for three weeks."

The remark about getting promoted was a

retaliating dig at Butterbaugh. There was a corporal vacancy in the detachment. Butterbaugh and a constable in a Border outfit fifty miles south had been running neck-and-neck, but lately Ed had fallen a furlong or two behind in the race, and the subject was a rather touchy one with him. Hence the retaliating dig.

"Oh, I don't know," Sergeant Chinnick took up Wilson's remark. "Getting pickled is one of the best ways I know of to rate promotion in this outfit."

"Is that so?" some one asked seriously. "For if so, I'm breaking barracks tonight and tanking up with Ed."

"Yes, it's so," Chinnick assured him. "The way I figure it is this: every one of us is a —— of a good man—"

He was interrupted by cheers. Calgary nearly had a disaster on a fishbone. With his fork handle Chinnick rapped for order.

"Corporal, thump Constable Wilson on the back. Hard—that's it! And pass him the bread. As I was saying, every one of us is a —— of a good man. We all know it; the officers all know it. Don't they tell us that—every inspection? So if you're just a plain —— of a good man, you're lost in the mob. But see here now. If you get lit up proper and come home in a blaze of fireworks singing hallelujah, it sets you apart from the mob. It draws attention to you—official attention, and that's what you need for promotion in this outfit. So that's why I say getting tight is a good way for Ed to rake in that corporal's job."

"The rest of you fellows," said Constable Oxford, "you may think Chinnick is joking. But I don't. I've seen them words of his fulfilled too often. You mind three years ago when them two Cossacks up in northeast Koot'ny murdered them Chinamen and then shot two Provincial constables in making a getaway? They hid out in a strip of wilderness from May till November. The Provincial couldn't get 'em, the mounted couldn't get 'em and the Indian scouts wouldn't tackle the job. Orders was to shoot 'em on sight, but nobody ever got a sight.

"You fellows think you know the rest of that story, but you don't. I'll tell it to you—the low-down truth. Don't forget this is on the strictly q. t. Corporal Holman of B told it to me just last month. You mind Holman was a buck cop three years ago. He says he was coming back home from a short leave; coming back on the C. P. He was fairly well cocked, he says. Only had sense enough to know that if he lit in his home station the M. P. would collar him. So about five miles out where the train slowed for a rock cut, he hopped off, he says, intending to walk on in and sober up doing it. Nice moon, balmy night and everything. He was halfway through the cut when he saw two men coming down the track. He slipped behind a pole, he says, to let them by. When they got close he saw it was them two Cossacks with their arms full of grub. He says the sight of 'em sobered him up in the shake of a flea's hind-leg, and he did some tall thinking in another shake. You know how he argued it out with them, then and there. Got three bullets through his hat and a corporalcy—all because he had been wetting his whistle."

"I thought he said he saw them Cossacks first and hopped off the train after 'em," Wilson objected.

"THAT job of Holman's was just a lucky accident," said Constable Mack, after Wilson's remark had been sufficiently ignored. "But here's one that wasn't: It was up in the Yukon a couple springs ago. Five Eskimos, or maybe it was Indians, got trapped on a river island just when the ice was going out. The river was rising over the island, the cakes was upheaving and grinding something fierce. Them Eskimos, or Indians, would have been dead niggers in three shakes of Bill's flea-leg. I guess the whole town was standing on the bank watching. A movie camera was even cranking away, too. Along comes Corporal—I forget his name; anyhow he was a plain, ordinary plug of a corporal like Babson here—"

"A buck cop talking," said Babson in a loud undertone.

"—like Babson here," Mack continued. "He had been bad sick and had drunk a lot to keep on his feet. He was keyed up to where he didn't give a whisky —— for anything and didn't know exactly what he was doing. He took one swift look at the situation and yelled at them Eskimos, or Indians, to cross that ice. They didn't have guts to start. This corporal got mad because his orders wasn't obeyed. He busted across after 'em, jumping, dodging,

falling; but he got to the island, and drove them Eskimos—or Indians—back across at the point of his gun. When his supe saw the movie of that stunt, this corporal got his three stripes, and a wad of hat money and a private bravery medal and personal letters from the commissioner on down. All because he happened to be carrying a high voltage that morning."

"I saw that picture," said Babson. "That's how I know you're telling the truth, Mack. But that'n don't hold a candle to this'n. I mustn't mention names, but here's the blithering truth. A certain C. O. at a post up north was married three years ago, and his wife not only run him but the whole shebang. The men got tired of that, but they never worked up nerve to kick or do anything. Then just this last spring the sergeant happened to get top-heavy one night and come home at sun-up. Ordinarily he was a plain old stick-in-the-mud like Chinnick here—"

"It's a two-stripe talking, men," said Chinnick.

"—but he must have mixed drinks or something that night, for he surelee was on an artistic toot. He stole one of the C. O. wife's garments and run it up the flag pole to high mast. When the post turned out a half hour later, there was a pink silk map of Ontario fluttering in the breeze."

"What happened to the sergeant?" Wilson ventured again. "Did he buy out, or desert, or do his time?"

"Son," Babson replied, with extreme gravity, "he did neyther. It stirred up an investigation and brought facts to light. The C. O. asked for transfer and got it. The sergeant got a commission and is now C. O. at the post because, as Chinnick says, it got him official attention."

"So you see, Ed," Chinnick drew solemn conclusions as the men began reaching for toothpicks, "you see you've got the right idee for tonight if you only stick to it. If getting thoroughly soaked won't rate you that corporal's job, try something else. Burn the stables, bust Inspector Plummet over the head with a chair, or even ditch a C. P. train. Anything to draw that official attention. Only, getting soaked is the easiest way, because Plummet is death on booze. Isn't he, Mack?"

Mack glowered. He had once lost a month's pay because of the odd glass. Beer at that.

When the men started to leave and the Chinaman began clearing mess, Butterbaugh pushed back his chair and went around to the sergeant.

"Seriously, I'd like to have a horse tonight, Chinnick. I sort of want to ride down and see Mary a couple hours."

Chinnick thought for a minute. He was a good sergeant, John Chinnick; regimental when discipline was required, but at other times standing between the strictness of Inspector Plummet and the plain human weaknesses of the men under him. It was as if one side of his face were a broad wink and the other side were frowning, hard-boiled discipline.

"Here's the situation, Ed," he explained. "Plummet is pulling off a raid tonight on a blind pig down the line. He sort of intimated there would be no passes. Several of us will go on the raid, so the rest will probably be kept here at the post. But you won't get any time again for two weeks, so I'll tell you what you do. Take a horse and scoot for Shingletown. If Plummet asks about you I'll tell him I sent you down the line ahead of us to throw off suspicion. If they see one patrol pass they won't be expecting a second. That same bunch have slipped away from us three times already, but tonight we're raiding them just after dark. That means you have to come back early, Ed, or it'll give my story a black eye."

"I call that decent, Chinnick," Butterbaugh said heartily. "I'll be back at ten-thirty sharp. If she makes candy, I'll bring you a box."

II

TEN minutes later Butterbaugh started blithely on his nine-mile jog to Shingletown, where Mary's dad annually manufactured enough red cedar shingles to roof Amsterdam, gables included.

His spirited black horse was a splendid looking brute. The same might also have been said of Butterbaugh. He was six feet straight-up, twenty-five years old, brawny, blue-eyed and tanned to the hue of his saddle. For the occasion he had spent two minutes slicking up his horse and the other eight in slicking up himself. He wore red jacket, Stetson, slacks, and polished ankle-boots.

Progress Pike was the euphemistic name given to a broad cinder road paralleling the

C. P. tracks and leading west down a mining and manufacturing valley. At intervals of a mile or so there were mines scattered along the pike, with a cluster of houses near each shaft. Two mountains, seven-thousand foot twins, stood on each side of the valley.

By the time Butterbaugh reached the first mine, a mile from the post, he began to realize that salt fish and pepper-sauce are no combination for a desert traveler. He had developed a red-throated thirst which a wayside spring could not allay one particle. So at this first mine community, he stopped in front of a shack grocery and purchased a can of Queen Victoria brand tomatoes.

They helped a little. He rode on hopefully. A mile farther along he came to Mountain Siding, a narrow pass between the feet of Mt. Hanover and Mt. Spruce, the twins. An iron mine led under Hanover, and a coal shaft entered Mt. Spruce. A C. P. coal-and-ore train was making up for Seattle.

The thirst by this time had come back again, stronger than ever. Butterbaugh's throat tingled and he had that unpleasant out-of-breath sensation peculiar to a salt thirst. Having already eaten one can of tomatoes, he had no particular appetite for more of them. So at the Siding grocery he purchased a can of Prince Albert brand cherries—big, unseeded fruit cooked colorless, with plenty of sweet fruit-juice covering them. When he was quite beyond the string of guttering oil lights which proclaimed the Siding community, he stopped, opened the can, and then rode on, forking the fruit out with his knife, squirting the seeds over the horse's head, and occasionally sipping the juice.

The cherries seemed to do the trick—for five minutes. At the end of that time a handful of centipedes were crawling up his throat again and his stomach felt like a haymow on fire. He dismounted at another spring and took on water. Beyond making him feel bloated, it made little difference. He had half a mind to turn back to the post. But that move, he recollected, would give Chinnick's story a very black eye. Consequently he rode on, blessing salt fish and pepper-sauce with vigor and variety.

Just before twilight he came to the Prouty-Brace Lead and Silver Mine. At the shack grocery built against the bank he purchased a can of Prince of Wales brand sliced pineapple. The biting juice only made things worse up and down his neck.

Half a mile beyond the silver-lead mine, he came to a north and south cross roads which led back into the mountain timber camps. A man astride a horse was talking to a lumber straw-boss. It was Jim Whittaker, an ex-Mounted who had bought himself out and gone into lumbering.

"Hello, Ed!" he called, dismissing the Swede. "How's tricks at the post?"

"Same old stuff. Only, we've got something new in mess."

"What's that?" asked Whittaker, who had been in service long enough to appreciate "something new in mess."

"Salt fish and pepper-sauce," said Butterbaugh. "I can't spit, I'm so —— dry."

"S'too bad, Ed. I et some salt fish and pepper-sauce once and I was seven hours getting back to normal. I can sympathize, son."

"How did you get over it?"

"Took a strong shot of Scotch. Only thing in the world that'll knock the spots off a salt fish and pepper-sauce thirst. It does the trick right now."

"Is that so? I'd give a leg for a shot, then."

He looked up at the mountain tops, as if interested in the weather.

Whittaker took his flask from its saddle pocket.

"I haven't any use for an extry leg just now, but I'll lend you a drink anyhow. Pull easy on that. It's strong stuff, Ed; and you never could carry much."

"Oh I don't know," Butterbaugh returned, after he had taken a good-sized drink. "I showed you the way home once. You mind that time you and me—"

They reminisced for ten minutes before Butterbaugh recollected that the evening was slipping and that he had business in Shingletown, four miles on down the pike.

"How's the salt fish and pepper-sauce?" Whittaker asked, just before they parted.

"Getting better, considerable better; but it's got room for a lot of improvement yet."

"Another swallow would do the trick proper. But d'you suppose you can carry another one, Ed?"

Jim Whittaker meant well; he had only the kindest and sincerest intention of doing his former patrol partner a friendly turn. He did not know that in the last half hour Butterbaugh had laid a firm foundation for a terrific jag. He was no tippler himself—

he had carried that emergency flask for eight months without refilling it; but he knew a thing or two concerning high liquors and their strange ways. Had he known about the tomatoes, syruped cherries and pineapple, he would not have suggested even a first drink, and certainly would not have worded his second offer in such a way that no self-respecting man could say no.

And Butterbaugh, in spite of his airs to the contrary, was a rank novice with things distilled. He harbored not the slightest suspicion or notion that whisky to him then was like a lighted match to a keg of powder. In short, his innocence betrayed him.

A COUPLE of generations ago in the West, "The White Buffalo" was a fairly common name for respectable saloons. The significance lay in the fact that the white buffalo was a rare beast. What the proprietor meant was that barrooms as orderly and good as his were scarce articles. In the White Buffaloes you could generally meet respectable people; you could get good liquor if you had money, and good food whether you had money or not; and the chances of your becoming an innocent bystander to a faro quarrel were practically nil.

But the name degenerated, as good names will, and the extent of the degradation was indicated by the fact that when Slith Benders elected to start a blind pig, he chose The White Buffalo for its whispered name. However, the name was in an odd way still appropriate, since blind pigs within raiding distance of the Mounted post were rare beasts truly enough.

At his joint the price of a pint of pink-eye was a day's hard labor in a mine head. The lad who was broke and hungry and asked for a hot-dog and coffee, was given a surly "git to —— out of here." His place drew the scum of the district—the knife-toters, the small-potato bad men, the would-be desperadoes, the worst of the foreign element.

The Mounted kept hot on his heels. Progress Pike and adjacent territory belonged to Corporal Babson and Constable Mack, and either of them could spot a blind pig within a month or two after it opened up. Consequently in half a year Benders had moved three times, always slipping out just ahead of the Mounted raids.

The present Benders mug-room, two miles from Shingletown, was a small dark ten-by-ten cubbyhole dug into the bank behind the grocery shack. A single heavy door led out into the legitimate place of business, where groceries, cold drinks and greasy lunches were sold and served. The business at the rear end speedily laid that of the front in the shade, for Benders had the right location. Within two miles were the Shingletown factories, four coal mines employing Galicians, several lumber camps of mixed crews, and a considerable sprinkling of *metis*.

Benders himself was a ponderous, beefy man, entirely too slow-witted to manage a blind pig successfully. For that purpose he employed as his hopper one "Soapy" Smith, a cunning Vancouver derelict who drummed up trade in cautious fashion, peddled to hill camps, and kept a weather eye out generally. It was Soapy who established a celestial connection with the Mounted post, and got wind of impending raids in time to clear out. Had his brains been directed toward legitimate pursuits, Soapy would have gone far; for he was quick of wit and sharp of eye, and some of his schemes and plans were nothing short of artistic.

Soapy was standing in the shack door looking up the pike toward the crossroads. Benders and a Chinaman were hastily throwing canned goods, liquors, small fixtures, various supplies, etc., into boxes. The motor truck which was to come and transport the whole stock to a place of safety was due at any time. A few customers still lingered—a sooty Galician, a shingle-factory worker, a strapping big negro and two watery-eyed nondescript whites.

In the doorway Soapy suddenly ejaculated "By ——!" so forcefully that Bender straightened up with a jerk, his face quivering.

"What's th' matter? It ain't *them* already?"

Soapy quieted his fears with a gesture and bade him listen. Up the pike a hundred steps a voice was raised in hilarious song:

> "We'll nail the old flag to the talles' flagpole
> An' we'll all re-enlis'—"

"What's that?" Benders demanded. "Who is it?"

"A lamb," Soapy replied coolly, without a second's hesitation.

Benders strode to the door. Butterbaugh was then passing through the glare of an oil light. The red of his uniform showed resplendent; but he scarcely looked regimental. His jacket was unbuttoned, his stetson had been lovingly placed on his horse's ear, and one leg was flung across the mount's neck.

"Lamb ——!" Benders spluttered excitedly. "That's a Mounted constable. You'll think he's a pair of panthers. Git inside. Close th' door. Out'n th' light—"

"Easy, easy," Soapy bade him. "He's stewed to de gills an' harmless. He's a lamb, I say."

"What d'you mean, lamb?"

"Dat's wot he is. Walkin' right into his bloody slaughter. Lemme handle dat gazabo—"

"You let 'im alone, you. Don't you go monkeyin'—"

"Lis'n here. I c'n handle de smartest yellow-stripe dat ever come down de pike, see. We're clearin' out anyhow, ain't we? Lemme handle dat gazabo. He's stewed already. We'll draw 'im in an' give 'im a couple more swigs. Den we'll dope de —— an' stretch 'im out on de floor in dat hind room, see."

"What good'll that do us?" Benders objected.

"Wot good, hiy? Lis'n here. When we git ready to pull freight, we'll tag a note on dis gazabo sayin' he was one of our best customers an' give us dope about de raids. Dat'll steer suspicion away from dis pig-tail, see. But dat ain't de big idy. Lis'n here. Dey'll come in an' find us gone an' find dere man here *dead drunk in de place dey was goin' to raid*. Won't dat be fingers on our noses at dem, hiy? You guys'll help us spread de news, hiy? Lu'me Susie, if dat won't be a wham at de whole bloody outfit!"

Even slow-witted Benders saw the cunning deviltry, the neat sword-like thrust, of Soapy's idea. He was itching for vengeance upon the Mounted, who chased him out of a location as soon as he got a good trade going. And here was vengeance with a vengeance.

It made no difference to him that the scheme would mean disgrace, imprisonment, a wrecked career for the unfortunate constable. His face cracked in a huge, slow grin.

"He's your meat, Soapy."

HE STEPPED behind the counter and busied himself with a dust-cloth. The other men sat tight, watching and ready to help. They belonged to the element which has no use for the Mounted and are always eager to defame them.

From the door of the grocery Soapy hailed the constable.

Butterbaugh was in that mellow condition where he loved the whole world and thought the whole world loved him. Ordinarily he could have taken two drinks without it affecting him much, but not on top of the things he had swallowed that evening. It was a tribute to his splendid body that the atrocious mixture had not brought him down completely. He was not maudlin drunk, but merely dizzy and very happy.

When he heard the friendly hail from the grocery shack he pulled over and stopped.

"Hello, partner; where you goin'?" Soapy queried.

Butterbaugh attempted to tell him, by song, that he was going to see his lady-love who lived by the old mill-stream.

"Come in a bit," Soapy urged, with a hand on Ed's leg. "Come in an' rest your shanks. We're lonely, we are, an' you're a real guy. We'll smoke a cigar an' sing a song an'—"

Butterbaugh dismounted and went in.

Soapy led him to a lunch table and gave him a cigar. They smoked, sang a song, and mutually swore a lasting friendship. Presently in an offhand manner Soapy suggested a friendly drink of whisky. Sheer cleanly habit, more than anything else, made Butterbaugh refuse.

"Just a beer then," Soapy urged. "We've got de real Cascade here, partner. A glassful—" he nodded to Benders.

The beer came. Butterbaugh's glass was spiked with raw alcohol, but he was in no condition to notice that and beer was not outlawed in the detachment. He drank it. Another appeared. He drank that. It began to work upon him very quickly.

At a gesture from Soapy the shingle-factory worker sauntered casually out of the door. A patter of hoofs a few moments later should have warned Butterbaugh that his mount was cantering back to the post riderless. The riderless horse would arouse a question—a question to be fully answered when they should find its rider drunk in a blind pig.

Under pretense of getting fresh cigars, Soapy slipped over to the counter. He scribbled hastily on a tag, slipped it under a tobacco can for future reference, and then whispered to Benders:

"He won't take whisky. Dope de next glass of beer. We got to git out of here. It's dark outside. Wonder where'n —— Jake is wid de truck? Dat —— patrol might be on de road for here now. We got to work fast. Dope 'er strong."

He went back to the table and waited for the third glass.

SOAPY had craftily seated Butterbaugh with his back to the counter so that he could see nothing. But there was a dirty wash-basin against the wall facing him and a mirror hanging on that wall above the basin. Benders across the tiny shack was working by a fairly bright oil lamp.

Butterbaugh had not yet taken leave of his common sense. He was simply happy, friendly and trusting. He was perilously near the rocky edge; he was getting lethargic and sleepy; but he could still think after a fashion and his mind could grasp a bald fact and hold on to it.

When he saw, in the mirror, that Benders surreptitiously dropped something into the foaming glass of beer and that the other four men nudged one another grinning, he stopped suddenly in the middle of a verse. For all his giddiness the act brought him up as sharply as if a bullet had whizzed past his throat.

His first reaction to that mirrored act was almost wholly reflexive, automatic—an instinctive recoil from a suspicious thing. It was a moment before the thought processes in his brain could work. He had heard of crimping; he knew that dope of various sorts was sometimes administered in liquor. The thought processes told him he was being drugged; that Benders was putting dope into his glass. It was a bald, stark fact which his faculties could grasp and hold on to.

The shock of realization sobered him considerably. He looked around like one suddenly awake, and noticed several things which had missed him before. He saw now that he was in a drink den, in company that made him shudder. What were they up to with that dope? Murder? Robbery? Hardly. The half-filled boxes on the floor, the half-empty shelves on the wall—in a flash he remembered Chinnick saying the detachment intended to make a raid that night. He guessed this was the place.

Roughly Butterbaugh saw through the plot. He had a swift picture of himself being found there dead drunk by Chinnick and Mack and Oxford and by Inspector Plummet.

"——!" he breathed, as one might when he eludes a rattler's thrust.

Soapy was watching him curiously, wondering what had happened. Butterbaugh noticed his suspicions. While he gathered himself together and shook off the giddiness, he pretended to be sinking farther into the stupor of drink. He blossomed out in song, he gushed nonsense, and thumped Soapy on the back. He ordered drinks for the house and put the wrong end of the cigar into his mouth. With his assurance back again, Soapy nodded to Benders. The third glass appeared on the table.

Slouched down in his chair, his head wagging from shoulder to shoulder, Butterbaugh was doing the quickest, hardest thinking he ever had done. He knew he was in no condition just then to fight; and if he tried to escape, all eight of them would pile upon him. It was his wits against theirs.

The first thing to do was to get complete control of himself, body and brain, again.

He kept saying over and over to himself—

"You're not drunk; you're mad, madder than ——!"

When the doped glass was set in front of him, he raised it clumsily to his lips. The glass slipped somehow and spilled over his face.

"Water!" he bawled. "Wanna wash. Whersh some water?"

Hiding his chagrin, Soapy got up and poured water into the dirty basin. Anything to jolly the yellow-stripe along and get him to swallow the dope.

Butterbaugh staggered to the basin and dashed cold water over his face. It freshened him remarkably. It helped him even more than he had expected.

"Z'too —— hot'n here," he grumbled, making a ludicrous attempt at getting his arms out of his jacket-sleeves.

Because the minutes were fleeting, Soapy quickly helped him get his jacket off, and led him back to the table. Butterbaugh ran his thumb along a chair rung until he

found a sliver. He pushed that sliver a quarter-inch up under his thumb nail. The pain brought cold, beaded sweat to his forehead, but it worked a wonder inside his brain. It killed, killed utterly, the silly giddiness vaporing around in his head. It killed the lethargy which had started to benumb his limbs. It gave him full command of his muscles and nerves again. He was ready.

Benders had doped another glass for him. Butterbaugh knew he could not fuzzle that one, or they would know he was tricking them. He had to do something in a matter of three seconds—while Benders was coming from the counter to the table.

His eyes roved drunkenly around the room. The clock said one minute past nine. The patrol might come in another minute or another hour. No help there; he was on his own.

He saw the Chink go in the door of the cubbyhole.

"Whazzat?" he demanded, waving a wobbly arm toward the door. "Z'at bear den?"

Soapy fairly leaped at his chance.

"It's a nice cool place to take a drink in," he said quickly. "Let's go back. Wot say?"

"—— yez!" Butterbaugh agreed violently. "Lezall go. Drink zon me. C'mon, you."

The shingle-factory worker and the two nondescript whites got up eagerly at this invitation to a free drink. The Galician probably did not understand. He sat still, as did the negro also. Butterbaugh tried twice to rise, but failed. Soapy helped him to his feet and supported him toward the door. By this time the other three were already inside with the Chinaman.

AT THE doorway something swift and drastic happened to Soapy. He felt a strong hand take him by the neck and another by the slack of his breeches. He was lifted up bodily and heaved into the room, so forcibly that the two nondescript whites whom he struck fell in a heap with him. The door of the cubbyhole banged shut and the bolt slid home.

With five of his enemy disposed of at one neat scoop, Butterbaugh whirled around and grabbed a chair. He had planned that beforehand, he had even picked out the handiest chair, for he suspected that Benders had a counter gun and that a fraction of a second might be vital. As Benders caught on and stooped for his weapon, a heavy chair whirled clear across the room and collided violently with that portion of his anatomy which was above the counter. Benders went down and out.

The Galician broke for the door to escape. But Butterbaugh was fighting mad; the leers and covert insults of the last few minutes had stung him to revengeful fury. He sprang for the Galician, caught him, whirled him around, let go of him, and then swung murderously. The two uppercuts, left-right, and a straight sock to the jaw as the Galician was falling, put him out for good.

The negro was left. He stood against the wall behind a table. Butterbaugh caught a flash in his hand and stopped. The negro had a razor out; the handle clutched tight and the blade laid back across his wrist. He thought Butterbaugh was scared and would run. He came out of his barricade with a rush and swung at the constable—a sideswipe which would have cut Butterbaugh's throat. Butterbaugh jumped back, grabbed a second chair and swung. The blow knocked the razor from the negro's hand but did not fell him. He grabbed a chair and the constable another one. The chairs met and broke to pieces. Free-handed Butterbaugh bored in and hammered the negro back against the wall. He was within one good solid blow of a complete victory.

"Don' shoot, mass'r," the negro screamed suddenly, over Butterbaugh's shoulder. "Foh de ——'s sake, don' shoot."

Butterbaugh did not even turn to look. He ducked and jumped aside. A bullet whizzed over him and missed the negro by a bare inch. He grabbed another chair, for he was twelve feet away from the counter. As he whirled it, a second bullet caught him in the leg. The chair struck Benders a glancing blow but it was enough. In two jumps the constable was across the room and over the counter, wresting the gun away from Benders. They grappled, knocked the flimsy counter down, and sprawled out into the center of the room. The negro jumped in to help. Butterbaugh sprang to his feet. Before Benders could get up, he waded into the negro barehanded. In his bull anger he hit like a trip-hammer. His

left caught the negro on the jaw; his right, which he aimed for the point of the chin, was an inch low. It caught the negro in the throat—a lucky miss, for the black wilted instantly, his legs sagged, his eyes rolled, and he fell over backward.

"Now then, you pink-eye peddler," Butterbaugh growled at Benders, who was on his feet again, "we'll settle—you and me. I'll hammer you into the floor."

As he took the savage fist-blows, unable to guard himself, Benders grunted like a stuck hog. He took a dozen before he was knocked to his knees. Once more Butterbaugh was within one good solid blow of having fought his way out on top. Had he polished Benders off then and there for good when he had the chance, the fight would have been over with. But he did not.

A motor had stopped outside the door. Butterbaugh heard it. It sounded like Plummet's car with the cut-out open. The patrol had arrived!

Reluctantly he let up on Benders. The newcomer was inside the door and only four steps from him before Butterbaugh realized that the patrol had not arrived and that the newcomer was a long ways from being a friend. He was a bigger man than Benders, husky as a stevedore; and he had a good-sized monkey wrench in his hand.

If Butterbaugh had met him at the door he could have settled the truck driver with one good swing of a chair before the man saw what was what. He realized, too late, that he should have hit the driver as he came through the door. But he had let his advantage slip. The fight now was thrown into a cocked hat again.

"Git 'im, Jake," Benders snarled. "Smash 'im. Let's murder the ——."

Cursing his mistake and his slowness in letting a fresh enemy get inside, Butterbaugh tore into the truck driver. He dodged a smashing swing of the monkey wrench and grappled with the man. They locked in a wrestle, crashed into the remaining table, broke it down and fell across it. They sprang up again, stood leg to leg, and traded fist smacks to the face. Something warm began to run down Butterbaugh's temple and into his right eye. Benders, still groggy and weak from the hammering he had received, got hold of half a chair and was pecking away at the constable's shoulders. Butterbaugh sidestepped from between them, kicked the proprietor viciously, and at the same instant snapped the truck driver's head back with a long swinging uppercut.

The two of them locked again, like a pair of grizzlies in a briar patch. Back and forth, from wall to wall, they finished wrecking the little shack. They upset the packing boxes and scattered the goods. They slammed against the thin-boarded walls, and what canned stuff remained on the shelves was jarred down. They pitched into the sheet-iron stove, and stumbled over the prostrate negro.

Half-blinded and very nearly exhausted, Butterbaugh knew he had reached his limit. He had to whip in a few seconds or go down and out. Benders had recovered from the kick and was coming for him.

He broke loose and grabbed a chair—his stand-by all that evening. The truck driver grabbed for it, and tried to wrest it away. Between them they tore it in two. A fraction of a second the quicker, Butterbaugh swung with his portion and knocked his enemy down. Benders was pecking at him again but he paid no heed. He fell upon the truck driver, grabbed him by the hair, and banged his head against the floor. Benders hammered him unmercifully but the constable stuck it out—till he felt his man go limp.

"That's the size of you, Monkey-Wrench," he snarled, and rose up. "Now you, you—" his voice rose in a rage at Benders, "I'm going to kill you this time. With my bare fists, so help me God!"

At the first bone-smashing swing Benders slumped against a wrecked table. Butterbaugh stood over him, hammering him to the point where he would not shoot at a man's back again or attack a man with a chair when he was fighting another man. With his blood thoroughly up and a berserker fury boiling in him, Butterbaugh might have made good his threat. He was half-foggy from the mauling he had taken, and hardly knew what he was doing.

His ears caught the grating of brakes outside and the sound of a motor. He would not have heeded it had not Benders, with a last grasp of strength, turned his body toward the door, as if expecting succor. Somebody banged into the door. Butterbaugh was not caught napping that time. He finished Benders with a terrific wallop, caught up the sole remaining chair, and was ready. When the door slammed

open and his blood-filled eyes saw a man burst in, he whirled the chair with all his power.

"Hey Ed!" a voice burst out behind the first intruder, who had been knocked to his knees. "Hey, what the ——? Stoppit! It's us!"

Butterbaugh would have swung again, but Chinnick, Babson, Oxford, Mack and Constable Etterson poured into the shack. They disarmed him and shook him. The two non-coms. pulled the first man to his feet and half-carried him inside where there was more light. Butterbaugh drew a hand across his eyes and took one horrified look.

He had broken the chair over the head of Inspector Plummet.

CHINNICK and Babson walked their officer around the room a couple of times, explaining what had happened.

"I'm all right, boys," he said presently, shaking his head as if he still were hearing bells. "But—look at constable—"

Butterbaugh, standing half dazed in the middle of the floor, looked like a first class wreck. The sleeves had been torn off his shirt, and the shirt itself slit to ribbons. His right trouser leg was blood-soaked; his face was covered with blood, and his hands looked like prime ribs of beef. Only a close friend would have recognized him.

He found his tongue in a moment and decided it was high time to start explaining.

"I didn't go to hit you, sir; I thought you was reinforcements for this gang in here like arrived just before you did and I had to get them before they got me because I was about—"

Plummet had been looking around at the wrecked shack and the four husky figures lying *hors de combat.*

"Are you quite sure it was an accident, Butterbaugh?" he demanded sternly.

"Quite sure, sir," Butterbaugh affirmed, so solemnly that the inspector's joke exploded in a laugh among the men.

"All right," said Plummet, with a slightly twisted but jolly grin. "I'll take your word for it. But I'll surely go on record as saying you swing a mean chair."

Butterbaugh thanked his stars for an officer who could get knocked down without taking offence.

"I just had a lot of practise with chairs," he replied.

"I'll swear you must have. They—I mean men—are lying all over the place."

"There's five more in that back room, sir. They were shooting through the door a little while ago, but they're quiet now."

"I don't blame 'em. If I was caged with a holy tiger I'd quiet down too. Who started this, Butterbaugh? We met your horse coming home and surmised something had happened to you. Chinnick says he told you to ride down the pike quietly."

"I *was* minding my own business, sir. They started this themselves. If they hadn't tried rough stuff on me they'd have got away, for that's their truck outside there."

The inspector whistled thoughtfully.

"Nine of 'em! I'll swear you finished what they started. Nine of 'em, heavens and earth, Butterbaugh—"

"What, sir?"

"Oh nothing. I was going to make a comment, but perhaps it would be better to make it to the superintendent."

III

THE next morning at ten o'clock when Sergeant Chinnick dropped in, Butterbaugh was sitting up in bed. He had several kisses of courtplaster on his face, a big bandage on his leg; and his hands, clumsily holding the *Calgary Star*, were swathed like a prize-fighter's. He felt as stiff as a board all over, and his joints seemed like rusty barn-door hinges.

"How's the boy?" Chinnick greeted.

"All right. What's happened outside?" Butterbaugh asked in turn.

He missed the morning duties and his patrol. It seemed a month he had been there listening to the various sounds of the post.

"Well, couple things. Calgary's motor-cycle *went* this morning."

"Went?"

"Run! No joking. That's what we get for plaguing him. Didn't you hear it?"

"I heard something. Wondered why we was having rifle practise in the morning."

"And oh yes, you got a box of candy from Shingletown. I guess the news got down there."

"Where is it."

"I et it."

"You what?"

"Babson and I did. We figured you was a sick man and oughtn't to have any. Besides, you mind I had a box coming."

"It's a good thing I've got a sore leg and busted hands. Good for *you*, y'understand."

"And oh yes," Chinnick went on, very casually. "I heard Plummet talking to supe over long distance this morning. I didn't *try* to listen, of course; the door was just open. Plummet told him three times about you crowning him with that chair. He thinks it's about the best joke that ever struck him. You ought to've heard them laugh. You'd think they was human. And you ought to've heard Plummet's report about your doings last night. Plummet always liked you well enough, but he didn't think you had any 'special stuff. Till last night, he thought you was just a plain —— of a good man.

"I didn't hear what supe said, but afterwards Plummet says to me—you know that parade-rest language of his—he says: 'The incident of last night will undoubtedly react to Butterbaugh's advantage and standing.' I guess you know what that means."

Ed Butterbaugh flushed slightly. It was the only indication of his leap of heart.

"Now," Chinnick went on, "it's your turn to tell me a couple things, Ed. There's something about this affair last night that I don't *kumtux*. I want the straight of it. Just between you and me, y'understand.

"That Soapy Smith was mad as cats at you this morning when Plummet examined him. He swore you came down the pike drunk and they pulled you in and got you drunker, and was getting ready to dope you. Plummet thought Soapy was just trying to get even with you for smashing things up and holding that outfit till we got there. But Benders and the other prisoners swore Soapy was telling the truth. Plummet must have thought you were playing drunk or something in order to trick 'em, for he just laughed at them. The harder they swore, the more he laughed.

"But now look here, Ed. Last night down there when we was sorting the men out of the furniture, I run across a note scribbled on a tag. It was signed by Soapy and I read it. It said you was one of their best customers and had been passing them word right along about the raids. It said some other things too—about the Mounted in general. Now what was Soapy driving at, Ed? Come across straight. I destroyed that tag because I didn't know what to make of it and didn't want to take any chances."

Butterbaugh thought for a minute before he himself understood what Soapy's purpose was. When he saw through it finally, it made him shiver.

"Look here, Chinnick," said he. "You fellows last night thought you were telling real lies. But here's what Mack calls the blithering truth and it lays 'em all in the shade. Listen here."

He told the whole story. As it proceeded, Chinnick's chair inched closer and closer, his eyes widened; and at the end he drew a breath like a cow on a frosty morning.

"Lord!" he commented softly, a few moments later. "If you was Irish I could understand it, Ed."

He strode to the window and came back again.

"Say, listen. You got drunk and you crowned Plummet with a chair, and it's got you or'll get you a corporalcy. But there's no use to stop with a corporalcy, Ed. When are you going to burn the stables or ditch a C. P. train or something like that?"

"Not for a little while, Chinnick, anyway. I'm not tired of wearing them two stripes yet."

A MESSENGER OF DESTINY

A Three-Part Story

Part One

by Talbot Mundy

Author of "Tros of Samothrace," "The Enemy of Rome," etc.

CHAPTER I

ROME. 54 B. C.

SUMMER twilight deepened and the bats began to flit among the tombs and trees that lined the Via Appia. Dim distant lights irregularly spaced, suggested villas, standing well back from the road amid orchards and shade-trees, but the stench of trash heaps and decaying ordure overwhelmed the scent of flowers, and there was a dirge of stinging insects irritating to seafaring men. The slaves who bore Tros' litter flapped themselves with olive twigs, muttering and grunting as they bent under their burden. Tros, extremely heavy and unused to being carried, delayed the march by rolling and tossing himself to and fro behind the litter curtains.

Beside the litter, cursing unaccustomed sandal-straps that chafed his swollen feet, limped Conops, with the tassel of his knitted seaman's cap dangling over the empty socket of his right eye. With his left hand he held the litter, and with the stick in his right hand he kept prodding the wretched contractor's slave in front of him, throwing him out of step and then abusing him in half the languages of Asia Minor.

On a horse behind the litter, looking like a centaur—for he rode magnificently—Orwic led twelve Britons, who marched leg-wearily with short spears over their shoulders; they wore a rather frightened look and crowded closely in the ranks. Behind them came a two-wheeled cart piled high with luggage held down by a net. Two Northmen were perched on the top of the pile, and behind the cart trudged four-and-twenty other Northmen, battles-axes over shoulder, targets slung behind them. They were bearded; eight were giants; they swung from the loins like men well used to it, although there was a hint of a deep-sea roll, and more than a suggestion in the northern song they hummed of wind, waves and battle on a surf-enthundered beach.

A beacon many miles away behind, where one stage-contractor was giving warning to the next one, beyond the sky-line, that a personage was coming southward and would need relays of horses, gleamed on the narrow road and made imagination leap the shadows in between; the Via Appia ran as straight as an arrow and the twenty weary miles resembled one.

In front, the lights of Rome blinked sparsely. There was a house on fire that threw a red glare on the belly of a cloud and showed in silhouette the roofs of temples and the outlines of two hills edged with

"The Messenger of Destiny," copyright, 1925, by Talbot Mundy.

buildings, like the teeth of a broken saw. There were temple lights, and over one or two streets where the night life swarmed there lay a stream of hazy yellow. Here and there a light showed through an upper window, and there was a suggestion rather than the sound of babeling tongues; Rome looked, in the near distance, like a crouching monster, and the ear deceived itself with what the eye conveyed.

In the shadows of the tombs and cypresses that lined the road lurked men—and occasionally women—who peered at the litter and vanished at the sight of so many armed men. Runaway slaves, almost numberless, lived in the shadow of terror cast by stenching gibbets, on which scourged human bodies writhed or rotted near every crossroad; there had been a recent and, as usual, sporadic outburst of official morals, so the runaways were rather less bold and more greedy than usual, lurking in the neighborhood of villas and the north- and southbound traffic, but afraid to try conclusions with the passer-by unless he was unarmed or unaccompanied.

"Master," said Conops at last, thrusting his ugly head in through the litter curtains, "take advice from me for once and let us find an inn. There are enough of us to throw out all the thieves who occupy the place—"

"Aye, and to make a meal for nearly half the bedbugs!" Tros interrupted. "No more inns, little man! Rot me such dung-heaps! Am I a Carthaginian ambassador* that Rome should not provide me with a decent place to sleep? I tell you, Conops, here, unless a man considers his own dignity, none thinks he has any."

"Would we were safely at sea again!" Conops grumbled, leaning his weight on the litter and kicking at one of the bearer-slaves, whose slouching irritated him.

"We are near Zeuxis' house. I see it yonder," Tros said, leaning through the curtains. "Bid the bearers turn where that tree, like a broken ship's mast, stands against the sky."

"Zeuxis? The name sounds like that of a Greek in foreign parts," said Conops gloomily. "Commend me rather to a crocodile! Not for nothing, master, was I born in Hellas. I know Greeks! Keepers of Roman inns are like their bedbugs—one can crack them between thumb and finger. But a Greek—has this Zeuxis a master?"

"He is a distinguished Roman citizen," Tros answered.

"Poseidon pity us! A Greek turned Roman is a wolf with a woman's wits! Better give me the pearls to keep!"

"Keep your insolence in bounds, you ignorant salt-water fish! Go forward—lead the way up the path beyond that broken tree; try not to behave as if you were selling crabs out of a basket! Spruce yourself! Erect yourself! Up chin, you dismal looking dog! Put your knife out of sight! Shall Zeuxis' servants think we are Cilician pirates? Swagger forward now, and ruffle on the manners of a nobleman's retainer!"

Conops did his best, shaking the dust from his kilted skirt and straightening his cap, but he limped painfully. Orwic, recognizing climax, ordered out a great ship's lantern from the cart and sent one of the Britons running forward with it; he thrust the lantern into Conops' hand and ran back to his place in the ranks as if ghosts were after him, whereat Orwic laughed.

THE lane by the broken tree was unpaved and dusty but there was a row of recently set cypresses on either hand; their height, a grown man's, intimated that the owner of the villa at the lane's end had not occupied it long, but he was advanced in his notions of living. There was gravel in the ruts, and there were no pigs sleeping in the shadows. The lowing of cows in the distance suggested affluence, and as the lane lengthened there began to be neat walls on either hand, built of the broken rubble of older walls well laid in *pozzolana*.*

The lane ended at a high gate swung on masonry posts surmounted by marble statuary, whose outline merged itself into the gloom of overhanging trees. A grille in the wooden gate was opened in response to Conops' shouts, demanding to know what the owner of the house would say to keeping the most noble and famous Tros of Samothrace waiting in the dark. The slave behind the grille remarked that he would go and see. During the short pause, all of them, including Orwic's horse, flapped savagely at swarms of gnats.

*One of the contributing causes of the second Punic War was the indignation of the Carthaginian ambassadors at being obliged to stay at an inn outside Rome.

**Pulvis puteolanis*—the material which the Romans mixed with lime to make their famous concrete.

Then the great gate swinging wide, revealed the porch of a Greco-Roman villa, newly built, its steps about two hundred paces from the garden entrance. Parchment-shaded lanterns cast a glow over the columned front, making the stucco look like weathered marble. There was a burst of music and an almost overwhelming scent of garden-flowers, as if the gate had dammed it and now let it pour into the lane. A dozen slaves came running, six on each side of the path, and behind them Zeuxis strode, combining dignity with haste, extending his arms in welcome as Tros rolled out of the litter and stood blinking at the lamplight.

"Tros of Samothrace—as welcome as Ortygian Artemis!" he cried in Greek, gesturing dramatically at the full moon rising like a mystery between the treetops.

"May the goddess bless your house, and you!" Tros answered. "Greeting, Zeuxis!"

They embraced and Tros presented Orwic, who rather embarrassed the Greek by leaping from his horse and also embracing him in the British fashion.

"All Rome would fight to kiss him if they knew how he can drive a chariot!" Tros said, half apologetically. "He is a barbarian prince."

"A prince among your followers—prosperity! The more the merrier, friend Tros, and the surprize adds zest. My house is yours; enter with your friend and take possession."

He led Tros by the arm, but paused to study him keenly in the lamplight on the porch, where slaves fawned and a steward prodded them to make them more obsequious.

"You have aged ten years in two," he remarked, "and yet—I will wager you bring good news."

Tros only grunted. Zeuxis led the way into a hall, of which he was comically ashamed. The walls were painted with scenes from the Iliad, done recently and too spectacularly. There the steward took charge of Tros and Orwic, leading them away to a bathroom, where slaves sluiced and kneaded them for half-an-hour and other slaves brought blue-bordered Roman clothing in place of their travel-stained Gaulish costumes. The luxury made Orwic talkative and it was an hour before they rejoined Zeuxis, in an anteroom beside the dining-room that faced on a tiled courtyard in which a fountain played amid flowers and young girls moved with calculated grace. There was music somewhere, not quite loud enough to make the fountain-splash inaudible.

"You must excuse my house," said Zeuxis. "I have baited it to catch some Roman buyer who has made a fortune selling war material. I am afraid the penalty you pay for coming unannounced is to wait for dinner, while the cook makes miracles. Why didn't you send word, you spirit of unexpectedness?"

Tros signified with a frown that he would prefer to keep silence until the slaves had left the room but Zeuxis laughed.

"My slaves will have your story from your followers. You may as well talk at your ease!" he assured him.

"I have only one man who can speak any language your servants know," Tros answered. "If your craftiest man—or woman—can get one word out of Conops, Rome is welcome to it. I sent no word because I trusted none to carry it."

The Greek leaned back in a gilded chair, looked humorously into Tros' eyes, took a goblet from a slave and held it while another poured the wine. Then he rose and, spilling a libation to the gods, smiled at Tros over the brim of the goblet.

"I see you understand the Romans," he remarked, and, having sipped, sat down again.

He was a handsome Greek with quantities of brownish hair curled artificially, his age perhaps not over forty, but not less than that. The care with which the wrinkles had been smoothed out from his face, and the deliberately studied youthfulness of gesture rather hinted that he might be older than he cared to seem. He had an air of artificial daintiness; there was a sapphire on the middle finger of his left hand that sparkled wickedly, calling attention to the delicacy of his fingers, which looked more capable of handling drawing instruments than weapons.

The contrast between him and Tros was as great as could be imagined between two men of the same race. Tros' great fist looked strong enough to have crushed Zeuxis with a blow; his raven-black hair, bound over his forehead with a gold band, fell to shoulders that were mounds of muscle. His amber eyes peered out from under shaggy brows that accentuated the bold stare; but there was nothing cynical about the humor

of the mouth-lines, whereas Zeuxis' smile suggested cynicism and ability to reach a given goal by going around obstacles, which Tros would simply smash.

THERE was desultory conversation for a while, because the slaves were Greek and were hovering too near for Tros to trust even to whispers. Orwic, knowing neither Greek nor Latin, watched the scantily clad girls and after a while confined his interest to one, whose movements were deliberately calculated to enchant him. He was hungry, but when the steward announced that the meal was served he followed Zeuxis with such manifest reluctance that the Greek laughed.

"Tell your barbarian friend not to leave his heart here. She shall wait on him at dinner."

The dining-room was classically elegant, its walls adorned with paintings of the Muses and divided into panels by Corinthian half-columns of white marble. The furniture was Alexandrian and the food, cooked by a slave from Syria, was carried in by Greek girls.

There was no sign of Zeuxis' wife; Tros guardedly remarked on it.

"She is at my country place in the Aventines," said Zeuxis. "Like many another foolish fellow I married youth and beauty instead of experience and domestic virtue. Beauty, in Rome, is a thing one doesn't understand, but it arouses greed; so if possible one steals it; failing that one buys. If neither, then one gets the lawful owner into difficulties and converts him to a Roman point of view—which means, to look the other way. So I have sent my wife to the Aventines in charge of a virago who, current rumor has it, is a midwife; you will have noticed, however, that rumor frequently exaggerates. Meanwhile, my difficulties disappear and trade is excellent."

Lolling gracefully on his couch at the head of the table, with Tros on his right hand, Orwic on his left, toying with the food rather than enjoying it, he kept up a running comment for the steward's benefit, not often praising the skill with which the viands were made to resemble something they were not, more often explaining how they might be better.

"My Syrian cook is an artist," he complained to Tros. "In Alexandria they might appreciate him. Here in Rome you must be vulgar if you wish for popularity. Food must be solid, in gross quantities and decorated like the Forum with every imaginable kind of ornament, the more crowded and inappropriate the better. Rome proposes to debauch herself with culture; so I have to crucify a good cook's soul and train girls how to misbehave. I was cursed with vision when I came into the world; I foresee the trend of events, and I know I must swim with the stream or go under; so I try to guide the Romans decorously along the line of least resistance. They began by being wolves and they will end by being pigs, but that is for the gods to worry over, not me. I am a contractor. I arrange banquets. I decorate interiors for *equites* who grew rich lending money. You know the system, of course? The tax-farmers drain the treasury of conquered provinces, compelling them then to borrow at twenty-four per cent. compound interest; when accumulated interest amounts to half-a-dozen times the principal, the inhabitants are all sold into slavery. Most of my girls were obtained in that way. Damnable? Undoubtedly. But I might be a slave myself if I had stayed in Greece instead of coming here and flattering that rich rogue Crassus. He had me made a Roman citizen, although I might have had the same favor from Pompeius Magnus. Do you know how Crassus made his money? With a fire-brigade. There are some who say he also kept incendiaries. His men monopolized the putting out of fires by always arriving first on the scene in great numbers and fighting for the privilege. Soon nobody else dared to try to put a fire out. Crassus' men would simply stand by and let the place burn until the owner was willing to sell it to Crassus for a song. Then out would go the fire, Crassus would restore the place and let it out at rack-rents. He has the gift of money-making.

"But he is mad; he covets military honors, and has gone to fight the Parthians, being envious of Cæsar's fame. Caius Julius Cæsar, if he lives, will ruin both him and Pompey, but they say Cæsar has the falling sickness; and I have also heard it said that his sickness is the result of slow poison secretly administered by one of his lieutenants in the pay of some patrician. Cæsar is a patrician; but he has made all the other patricians loathe him by his systematic

pandering to the plebes. He sends gladiators for the games and corn-doles—that might not matter so much; they all do it. His worst offense is the money he sends from Gaul to buy the election of candidates who keep Rome in political torment. He also sends presents to senators' wives, and keeps a swarm of paid propagandists, who sing his praises to the crowd at every opportunity. Cæsar has brains. One of the brightest things he ever did was to marry his daughter to Pompey. She is a charming woman. Consequently, Pompey has to pose as Cæsar's friend, whatever his feelings may be—not that they are particularly secret—he says little, but every one knows he thinks Cæsar a dangerous demagogue."

ZEUXIS gossiped gaily through the meal, doing his best to loosen Tros' tongue and reversing usual procedure, ordering the finer qualities of wine brought as the meal progressed. Orwic, unaccustomed to such subtle vintages, drank copiously and before the meal was over fell asleep. Tros' taciturnity only increased as he listened to Zeuxis' chatter. He had almost nothing to say until the meal was finished and Zeuxis wanted to leave Orwic in the women's care.

"Zeus!" he exploded then. "Sober, a man needs help to save him from the women. Drunk, not all the gods together could protect him! And besides," he added, looking straight in Zeuxis' eyes, "I myself will tell you all you need to know. If you have a slave-woman who knows Gaulish, keep her for some necessary business."

Four slaves carried Orwic to a bedroom and Tros sent for Conops to sleep on a mat at the foot of the bed.

"Not that I doubt your honor, Zeuxis, I am thoughtful of it. This handsome cockerel recovers like a Phœnix from the ashes of a feast. Not remembering where he is, he might remember, nevertheless, that he is a king's nephew—which means a king's son, less the need of self-restraint. Conops knows how to manage him."

Conops' one eye glinted meaningly as he met Tros' glance and nodded. Hideous though he was, it took no augury to guess that Zeuxis' women had been making love to him for information; he made a gesture with a clenched fist that meant, and was interpreted to mean, "they have learned nothing from me!"

Zeuxis led into a room where gilded couches with a low wine-table set between them gave a view through an open window into the lamp-lighted courtyard, where a dozen girls were posing near the fountain.

"Shall they dance?" he asked.

"Aye—into the River Lethe! Let a slave set wine in here and leave us," Tros suggested.

Zeuxis laughed, dismissing the girls with a wave of his hand. The slaves retired. Tros strode to the curtain drawn on rings across the doorway and jerked it back to make sure none was listening. Then he glanced into the courtyard and at last sat down on the window-ledge, whence he could talk while watching both the courtyard and the corridor beyond the now uncurtained door.

"I am honored!" said Zeuxis, bantering him. "These must be deadly secrets you intend to pour forth. Come and drink; this wine of Chios was reserved for Ptolemy the Piper. I was able to acquire it because Ptolemy came to Rome to borrow money when the Alexandrians drove him off the throne. He gave a feast to a number of Roman senators, for which I was the contractor and, though they lent him money, he has never paid my bill. I shall have to repay myself by roundabout means. The senate is forever obedient to the money-lenders. Mark my words—they will send Cæsar or Marcus Antonius one of these days to collect. Drink! Ptolemy the Piper knows good wine, if nothing else. The old fool gave his note to Cæsar for seventeen and a half million *sesterces* to persuade him not to veto sending Gabinius and Rabirius to Egypt.

Tros reached under his tunic and produced a little bag tied tightly with a leather thong. He bit the thong loose, glanced into the bag, tied it again and tossed it into Zeuxis' lap. The Greek weighed it, eyed it curiously, opened it at last and poured nine pearls into his hand. His eyes blazed.

"Plunder?" he asked.

"My gift," said Tros.

"By Aphrodite's eyes! By all the jewelers of Ephesus—these are better than the pearls that Pompey took from Mithridates. There are no such pearls in Rome," said Zeuxis, rolling all nine on the palm of his hand and stirring them with a sensitive forefinger. "They are matched! Tros, they are priceless! Whom do you wish to have murdered?"

"Are you a contractor in that trade, too?" Tros asked him sourly.

"No, but since Sulla's time one can always hire that sort of tradesman. Nobody is safe in Rome without an armed band at his back. Do you wish me to introduce you to a Roman who will work himself, for a consideration, into the necessary righteous frenzy? And who is the victim to be? Some one important, or my wits deceive me as to the value of this present."

"When I must kill, then it is I who kill," Tros answered. "I could buy nine senators with those nine pearls."

"You force me to admire myself!" said Zeuxis. "Have you any more of these?"

"Nine more for you, of nearly the same weight if—when my venture is successful."

"Tros, you deal a dreadful blow against the inborn honesty of Hellas! Whom do you wish me to betray to you, and why?"

"Yourself!" Tros answered. "One who did not know me might propose to play me false. But you will not commit that indiscretion. I have chosen you to assist me in a certain matter."

"You oblige me to pity myself!" remarked Zeuxis. "A king's nephew and a king's pearls? Rome is no playground for kings; they come here begging, or to walk in triumphs and be strangled afterward. Whoever befriends kings in Rome—and yet—friend Tros, these pearls are irresistible! Have you come like a messenger from Pluto to arrange my obsequies?"

"I come from Britain."

"Britain? The end-of-the-world-in-a-mist, where Cæsar landed with the famous Tenth and ran away again by night? Hah! How the patricians gloated over that defeat! I was decorating Cicero's new villa at Pompeii and I overheard him telling what the senate thought of it; they were overjoyed to learn that Cæsar is not invincible."

"But he is," said Tros. "He is invincible unless we can— But he is not invincible! And that is why those pearls rest in the hollow of your hand!"

CHAPTER II

POLITICS

ZEUXIS stared, his shrewd, imaginative eyes growing narrower under slightly lowered lids. He was not one who attempted to conceal emotions; he preferred exaggeration as a safer mask. But Tros' face, as he sat still on the window-ledge, was a picture of iron resolution, unafraid although aware of danger. Zeuxis was aware of an excitement he could not resist.

"I have a friend who is a king in Britain," Tros began, but Zeuxis interrupted—

"Kings are no man's friends."

"I have already helped him against Cæsar; and he helped me to build my ship. Caswallon is his name."

"Did he give you these pearls? Beware! King's gifts are more expensive than a money-lender's coin!"

"I had those from the Druids."

"Ah! You interest me. I have talked with Druids. Cæsar sent a dozen of them in a draft of prisoners from Gaul, and there was one who had a beard that nearly reached his knees. He was so old he had no teeth and it was hard to understand him, but he knew Greek and could write it. I befriended him. The others were sold as secretaries, but since that old one was a hierarch they were to keep him to walk in Cæsar's triumph; the weight of the fetters killed him before long—that and the stink of the dungeon; he was used to open air. There was a new ædile making a great bid for popularity and I was one of three contractors who had charge of the games he squandered stolen money on, so I had plenty of opportunity to talk with that old Druid. I used to go down to the dungeons whenever I had time, pretending to look for some one who might make a showing against an enormous bear they had sent from Ephesus —bears usually kill a man with one blow, whereas what the spectators want is to see a fight. It was thought, if a man with a knife could defend himself against the bear for a few minutes that ædile might be very popular.

"I didn't find a man to fight the bear. I did not want to; I was interested in the Druid, he talked such charming nonsense with such an air of authority. He told me, among other things, that Cæsar is an agent of dark forces that will blot out what remains of the ancient mysteries and make Rome all-powerful for a while. He said that if Cæsar dies too soon those forces will find some other one, because their cycle has come, whatever that means, but meanwhile Cæsar is in the ascendant because he typifies the spirit that asserts itself in Rome. So if you think as much of the Druids as I

do, Tros, you will think twice before you oppose Cæsar."

"I have thought twice, and the second thought was like the first," Tros answered.

"Think a third time. Rome is violent, strong, cruel, split up into factions yet united by its greed—they have had to postpone the elections, and Pompey does nothing—I tell you, Cæsar is inevitable! Let us flatter Cæsar and grow rich when he has made himself the master of the world!"

"Those pearls are enough riches for the present. They are worth a fortune," Tros reminded him.

"There is no such thing as enough," said Zeuxis. "There is too much and too little, but enough—who ever saw that? You have given me nine pearls. I covet nine more. And I am Greek enough to know that I must pay a usurer's price."

"No, you may give them back to me."

Tros held his hand out. Zeuxis poured the pearls into their little leather bag and slipped it into a pocket underneath his sleeve, where no one would have suspected that a pocket might be hidden.

"What do you propose? That we should start a revolution?" he asked. "That would bring Cæsar down on us. He conquers Gaul for money and to make himself a reputation; and he corrupts Rome into anarchy so as to have the city at his mercy when the time comes. I could guarantee to start a tumult the day after tomorrow, but as to the consequences—"

"If Cæsar should descend on Rome, he could not also invade Britain. I intend to save Britain," Tros answered.

"But you might destroy Rome. Pompeius Magnus is growing lazy, but he hates luxury and corruption—for other people. There is nothing too good for himself. He would rally the patricians to fight Cæsar's faction to the death. That might mean ruin for all of us. I am a parasite, who fattens on rich men's ignorance. There would be only ignorance and no wealth after a civil war, whichever side should win."

"Let Rome rot. But who spoke of revolution?" Tros retorted. "I am here with thirty men to find some way of bridling Cæsar. I would not give one pearl to buy the Roman mob. They would sell themselves for two pearls to the next man, and for three pearls to a third. But I have bought you, Zeuxis! Tell me how to put a stick in Cæsar's wheel."

Zeuxis studied Tros' face over a goblet's brim.

"I prefer not to be crucified," he answered, "but pearls rob me of my judgment. There is only one way to control Rome—through a woman."

Tros exploded. His snort was like a bison's when it spurns the turf.

"I will have no truck with women! Let Cæsar manage the senate with his presents to the cuckolds' wives. I play a man's game."

ZEUXIS, filling up his goblet, smiled and let the lamplight show the color of the wine.

"Ptolemy the Piper is a drunkard," he remarked, "but he—I said nothing about women. I said 'through a woman!'"

"Lord Zeus!"

"But the very gods and goddesses love one another, Tros. However we may think of women in the mass, one woman brought you into the world and one bore me. One woman supplies the key to any situation—as for instance, Cæsar's daughter, who has kept him and Pompey from each other's throats."

"I will not stoop to such practises," Tros answered.

"I have known men who were forced to rise to them!" said Zeuxis. "But I only mentioned Julia by way of illustration, and she is too ill to be any use to us. I was thinking of another woman—Helene, daughter of Theseus, a musician, who came with old King Ptolemy from Alexandria. She is the scandal and the admiration of all Rome. The sons of newly-rich *equites* wear flowers filched from her garland and brawl about her in the streets, while their fathers defy even the Vestal Virgins in refusing to let her be expelled from Rome. Some say she is a spy for Ptolemy; others that she seeks revenge on Ptolemy and plots to send the Roman eagles into Egypt. The truth is, she has genius and seeks enjoyment. She adores sensation. It was she who posed to Timonides of Corinth for the new statue of the Venus Genetrix; his workshop was so thronged with visitors that he removed the unfinished statue all the way to Tarentum, but when he did that she refused to go there and the statue is still unfinished. She rides in a gilded litter, and as she isn't a slave they can't prevent it. Recently she offered to drive her own *quadriga* in the races, and

when the ædile refused to permit that she offered to fight Juma, the Nubian gladiator. Some think she might have beaten him, but the Vestal Virgins would not hear of such a scandalous proceeding. She has brains enough to understand that stirring of desire is much more profitable than to satisfy it. For a pearl or two we might persuade her to amuse herself immensely for our benefit. By Heracles, I have it!"

Zeuxis rose dramatically, one hand raised, as if he plucked a great idea from the ether, but Tros watched him without enthusiasm.

"Let us send the girl to Cæsar."

"Trash!" Tros answered. "I could dig that thought from any dunghill. Cæsar is not Paris, son of Priam—he is Cæsar. He would take, but the woman is not born who can seduce him. Cæsar smiles once, and the craftiest surrender to him like ice to the sun. I know him. Five times I have met him, and he—almost—won—me! I admired his brilliance. He has an intellect. He recognizes strength on the instant, or weakness equally. He can read men's character as I read wind and sea; and he can use the rogue or the weakling as I use puffs of wind to fill my sails. But he prefers to match his strength against the strongest, even as I love conquering the storms. Five times I have met him. Three times I have beaten him. And each time he has offered me command of all his fleet. I laughed in his face."

"I remember your father was mad," remarked Zeuxis. "But why imitate madness? Why in the name of all the mysteries of death should you reject the friendship of a man like Cæsar? That is wanton waste of golden opportunity! And you a Greek from Samothrace! Have you not sense enough to realize that fortune favors Cæsar? Will you flaunt your prejudices in the face of Providence? I tell you, Cæsar will inevitably be master of the world unless accident prevents."

"Then let my name be Accident," said Tros.

"In the name of the immortal gods who turned their backs on Hellas when the Romans came, let us be wise men and swim with the tide!" Zeuxis urged him. "You and I are not heroes. Cæsar is. We might destroy him, as I have seen dogs drag down men in the arena; but the dogs did not turn into men; nor should we become Cæsars. Tros, I tell you, we should let this Cæsar burst a breach for us in fortune's walls and follow in with him. Success is sweet! I drink to it! Failure is bitter; lo, I hurl my dregs at it! Men live longest who know enough to follow fortune's favorites."

Tros snorted, thumping a fist down on his thigh. He glared at Zeuxis as if eyes could burn him up.

"Aye, gods have turned their backs on Hellas. She is dead. I live!" he answered. "And I measure life by strength of living, not by days and nights and lustrums. Failure? A beached fish for it! Riches? There isn't a rogue in Rome who mayn't be as rich as Crassus if he has the luck. What is worth having in this life? Dignity and friendship, Zeuxis! Courage to stand by a friend! Vision and will! The choosing between right and wrong! The pluck to take the weaker side—the obstinacy to persist—rebellion against the wrong thing—action! Those are life."

"Then why not be the friend of Cæsar?" Zeuxis argued. "Friendship should not be squandered on unworthy people. If choosing is the gist of life, choose wisely! Cæsar will give you action; and if the weaker side amuses you, choose his. He is all-powerful in Gaul, no doubt; but here in Italy Pompeius Magnus has the gauge of him at present—or so the senate thinks, and so think nearly all the *equites* and the patricians—and so thinks Crassus, or he never would have gone to Asia to try to wrest a triumph from the Parthians. Select the cause that seems the weaker at the moment; then—success?—suppose we call it opportunity for further effort. You are a young man. You may outlive Cæsar. It would be no mean memory that you were Cæsar's friend. If he should have rewarded you—"

"With what?" Tros interrupted. "There is nothing in Cæsar's gift worth *that* to me, except his enmity!" He snapped his fingers. "Money? The stolen gold of Gaul! Employment? Holding in subjection ravished provinces, or possibly offstanding pirates who are no worse than himself and only seek to glean where Cæsar harvested! Honors? He has no honor. He has avarice and energy and skill; he can arouse the sentiment of pauper-soldiers driven from their farms by cheap slave-labor he himself sent from the looted provinces. But honor? He mocks it! He serves out honors as he feeds his legions, from the commissariat. He

keeps faith when it pays him, and because it pays."

"By the forsaken gods of Hellas, Tros, I think we all do that," said Zeuxis. "You have paid me to keep faith with you; and since you whetted my discretion and my appetite with one gesture of royal extravagance, why not confide in me a little? You spoke of a ship. Where is the ship? Where did you land in Italy?"

"I LANDED at Tarentum. My ship is at sea," Tros answered. "She will come for me to Ostia, where Conops shall quarter himself in order to hurry to me with the news of her arrival. I found me a pilot in Gades who knows Roman waters; and I have a Northman in charge of the ship, whom I trust because he and I fought until we learned the temper of each other's steel."

"Cæsar has a way of knowing what his enemies are doing. Does he know you are in Rome?" asked Zeuxis.

"He knew I left Gades for Rome. I had a brush with him in Gades. I won from him authority to use all Roman ports. I have a letter from him, signed and sealed."

"He knows you are his enemy?"

"He does."

"Then that letter is worth exactly the price of damaged parchment! I suppose you haven't heard how Cato proposed to the senate to revive Rome's reputation by sending Cæsar in fetters to the Usipetes and Tencteri. Cæsar broke his word to them and violated the law of nations; but how much support do you suppose Cato aroused? Men simply laughed. Even Cæsar's enemies laughed. There is only one way to win influence in Rome—that is, purchase it in one way or another. If you buy with money in advance, the danger is that your opponent will out-buy you. Besides, how can you compete with Cæsar? His agents Balbus and Oppius have spent sixty million sesterces in buying up old buildings alone, to enlarge the Forum. Prices—any price at all; but 'Vote for Cæsar!' If any senator wants money he goes through the farce of selling a house or some worthless work of art to Cæsar at an enormous price, so as to avoid conviction of receiving bribes. The plunder from Gaul provides work at unheard-of-wages for the artizans, who would undoubtedly accept your bribes but would also continue to pocket Cæsar's wages; they look to Cæsar to go on enriching them forever, whereas you would only be a momentary opportunity.

"The better method is to entertain them, which is almost equally expensive. You would find the competition deadly. But there is this to be said; the mob will be faithful for as long as nine days to whoever gives it a good thrill. After that you must think of another new thrill—and another one. Keep Rome entertained and you may even nominate her consuls."

Tros rose from his seat on the window-ledge and paced the room, his hands behind him and the muscles of his forearms standing out like knotted cords.

"You know Cato?" he demanded.

"Surely. Only recently he had me driven from his door. I represent the decadence he makes his reputation by denouncing—the ungrateful, vain, old-fashioned snarler! He is the best man in Rome and politically the most contemptible, because he means exactly what he says and keeps his promises. Pin no hopes on Cato."

"Cicero?"

"He owes me money for his new house. I have a little influence with him. But he is much more heavily in debt to Cæsar. Cicero measures gratitude by bulk; he will even praise bad poetry if rich men write it."

"Marcus Antonius?"

"Profligate —drunk—insatiable —rash—a Heracles with a golden voice, in love with popularity. He knows how to win the mob's plaudits—and at present he favors Cæsar."

"Have you the ear of Pompey?"

"Nobody has. He has the best taste of any man in Rome, so he is naturally disgusted with politics. He glooms in his country villa, where even senators are turned away. Pompey half imagines himself superhuman but half doubts whether his good luck will continue. I believe he is losing his grip on himself. He recently refused to be made dictator on the ground that there is no need for one, but I think the fact is, he has no policy and doesn't know what to do. His wife is ill, and if she should die he might come out into the open as Cæsar's enemy, but at present he makes a show of friendship for him.

"His intimates flatter him out of his senses; and because of his easy success in the war against the pirates and his aristocratic air of keeping his intentions to himself he is the most feared man in Rome. But the

mob believes Cæsar will bring fabulously rich loot out of Britain, which makes the moment inauspicious to oppose Cæsar; and though Pompey loathes the rabble he likes their votes. Who wouldn't? Also, I think he honestly dreads a civil war, which would be inevitable if he should announce himself as Cæsar's enemy. You have no chance with Pompey."

Tros came and stood in front of Zeuxis, frowning down at him, ignoring a proffered goblet of wine.

"Have you the ear of any one in Rome who could serve my purpose?" he demanded.

"I have told you—Helene of Alexandria."

Tros snorted again, but Zeuxis went on:

"At the moment she is keeping rather quiet because three days ago two factions of young fools fought about her with their daggers in the Forum. Two sons of *equites* were killed and half-a-dozen badly hurt. Cato was furious. She must be nearly bursting after three days' seclusion. She likes me because—well, to be candid with you—she influences business and draws fat commissions. The best advice I can give you is to see Helene."

Tros scowled and stroked his chin.

"Tomorrow morning. Why not? It will be a novelty that will stir her craving for amusement. You arrive at the door of her villa with a handsome young barbarian prince, exactly at the moment when she is ready to burn the house over her head with boredom. Flatter her—amuse her—praise her—bribe her—and she will ruin Cæsar for you if it is possible to do it."

Tros groaned aloud, shaking his fists at the painted ceiling—

"O Almighty Zeus, am I never to be disentangled from the schemes of women?"

"You are forgetting Leda and the swan," said Zeuxis. "Even Father Zeus himself has had entanglements at times!"

CHAPTER III

HELENE

THREE hours before dawn Tros awoke Orwic to discuss proposals with him.

"Cato is the noblest Roman of them all. He is incorruptible. This woman Helene is Rome's paramour. Cato's party is in contempt because it is old-fashioned and honest. Which shall it be? Shall we attack Rome's weakness or ally ourselves to her strength?"

"Try both! Orwic murmured sleepily. "What difference does it make to me? I know no Latin. I can neither make love to a woman nor address the senate! It appears I can't drink! That fellow Zeuxis' wine has made my head feel like a copper kettle."

Orwic fell asleep again and Tros went to his own room, where he lay cudgeling his brains to find the right solution of the problem. He could foresee nothing. It was possible he was in danger of his life, equally possible that Cæsar's enemies might leap at every opportunity and stage a demonstration that should force Cæsar to abandon his attempt on Britain. Should he adopt a subtle course or the direct one of appealing bluntly to such men as Cato, Cicero and Pompey?

Zeuxis, on the other hand, with pearls in mind, sent a slave with a letter in haste to Helene's villa; and three hours after daybreak two of her litters, borne by slaves in her livery and with a eunuch in attendance, waited in front of Zeuxis' porch.

By that time Zeuxis and his guests had breakfasted under the awning in the fountained courtyard and already Zeuxis was deep in his affairs—mercurial, excited—giving orders to his foreman in an office whose walls were hidden behind drawings and sheaves of estimates. There was a staff of nine slaves busy figuring at long desks, and a stream of tradesmen and subcontractors poured in and out, all chattering. But Zeuxis abandoned business when he heard that those litters had arrived.

"Tros, fortune smiles on us!"

He ordered his own chariot brought—an extremely plain affair, unpainted, drawn by mules.

"Lest I arouse cupidity! My customers would be annoyed if I looked rich. Rome is still a straight-laced city—except for the rich Romans!"

Refusing to explain, he almost dragged Tros into the first litter and waved Orwic into the other. Tros found himself on scented cushions behind embroidered silk* curtains through which he could see but remain unseen. An escort of men armed with staves went before and behind and a eunuch, modestly arrayed, but strutting like

*There was quite a large trade in silk from China by way of Socotia and Alexandria.

a peacock, led the way—for a while in the dust of Zeuxis' chariot. Zeuxis drove full pelt to have a first word with the lady who had sent the litters, and was shortly out of sight.

They passed into the city through a swarming crowd of slaves and merchants, skirted the Mons Palatinus by a smelly street between brick houses, crossed the Tiber by a wooden bridge, where slaves of the *municipium* stood guard at either end to put out fires and regulate the traffic, and emerged into the zone of trans-Tiberian villas, where hardly a house was visible because of densely planted trees and high walls, and the only gaudy ostentation was displayed on decorated gate-posts. There was much less traffic over-river, although chariots, often preceded by men on horseback and usually followed by breathless slaves on foot, were driven recklessly, their drivers shouting to foot-passengers to clear the way; and there were countless slaves carrying provisions and merchandise for sale. There were no armed men in evidence, but the high walls of the villas suggested fortifications and the general impression was of jealously guarded privacy.

The villa occupied, but not owned, by Helene faced the Tiber between higher walls than ordinary, above which the trees had been topped to make them spread into impenetrable masks of dusty green. On the high gate-posts were portraits in color intended to convey a sort of family likeness of the succession of Romans who had owned the place—and lost it to a money-lender, from whom Helene rented it.

Her slaves were at the gate, all liveried. An impudent Cyprian eunuch, in canary-colored robes and wearing his mistress' portrait on a copper disk hung from his neck, commanded that the gate be opened, saluting the litters as they passed in, but tempering civility with a leer that made Tros' blood boil; and almost before the gate had slammed again his squeaky voice was raised in vinegary comment on the impatience of the slaves of certain *equites* who sought admission with letters and gifts to be delivered into the fair Alexandrian's hand.

"Tell your masters that my mistress will receive gifts when it pleases her. Has none brought any gifts for me? What sort of persons are your masters? Paupers? Plebes? Ignoramuses? What are they?"

The villa was built in the style that had grown fashionable when the Roman legions brought their plunder home from Greece. It was faced with columns looted from a temple in Bœotia and stolen statues—fawns, Bacchantes, Naiads—grinned, danced and piped under every group of trees, so that the grounds looked like the entrance to an art museum; it would have taxed even the ingenuity of a Roman money-lender to find room for one more proof that culture can be dragged in with a team of oxen.

But within there was something like taste, although the cornices were far too richly ornamented and the paintings on the walls were garish. Some woman's hand had draped the place with Babylonian embroidery, so rich that it challenged attention and threw overcrowded elegance into comparative obscurity. The art of Alexandria had overlaid confusion of design.

However, there was no time to admire the hangings. There was laughter, the echoing clash of weapons and the thumps of bare feet leaping on a marble floor. There was a glimpse along a marble corridor of gardens leading to the Tiber and then the eunuch drew aside embroidered curtains to reveal a sunlit court surrounded by a balcony. Young Romans lounged against the columns, laughing and applauding; in the midst of one side Zeuxis sat amid a group of women, to whom he appeared to be giving intricate instructions. In the midst of the mosaic, sunlighted floor, half-naked and aglow with exercise, Helene fought with net and trident against a Nubian armed with a blunted sword. There were great red splotches on her skin where he had smitten her, but he was backing away warily, circling toward her right to keep clear of the sharpened trident that she held in her left hand.

Suddenly, as Tros strode in, she lunged with the trident. The Nubian dodged and tried to smite her with the flat of his short weapon. She ducked, leaped, cast her net and caught him, spinning her trident and driving its blunt end with a thump against his ribs. Then, clinging to her rope, she spun herself around him, keeping him tight in the toils and prodding him until he yelled for mercy while the onlookers shouted applause.

"Hic habet! Punish him! Don't spare him!"

She did not cease until the Nubian went down on his back and she had put her foot

on him, holding up her trident in imitation of a victor at the games, amid cries of "Kill him!"—"No, wait—whose gladiator is he? He might cost too much."—"I'll pay for him. Go on, Helene—see if you can kill him with the trident—only one thrust, mind!—it isn't so simple as it looks."

She laughed down at the gladiator, breathless, prodded him again and turned away—caught sight of Tros and Orwic with their backs to the curtained entrance, and came running to them.

"WHICH is the king's nephew? Which is Tros?" She looked at Orwic longest so he took her in his arms and kissed her; which was perfect British manners but, to put it mildly, unconventional in Rome. The sons of Roman *equites* roared their astonishment, loosing noisy volleys of jests, but Orwic kept her in his arms and kissed her three times on the mouth before she could break free.

"*This* is the king's nephew!" she assured them in a strident laughing voice that made the courtyard ring. The other—"

Tros raised up his hand in greeting and the banter ceased. He was dressed as a Roman; except for the gold band on his forehead and the length of his raven hair he might have been a Roman of the old school, conscious of the debt he owed his ancestors.

"—this other doubtless is the uncle!" said Helene. "I expected Tros of Samothrace. All hail, thou king of an end of the earth! Helene welcomes you to Rome, where even Ptolemy had to wait on Cato's doorstep! Isis! You have dignity! What muscle! Do you seek a queen, most terrifying majesty? Or is the nephew to be married? I abase myself!"

She curtsied to the marble floor, the rhythm of her movements bringing a burst of applause from the gilded youths, who cried to her to repeat it, some urging her to dance—all anxious to attract her attention to themselves. Zeuxis left the women who surrounded him and, stepping forward into the sunlight, cried out:

"Pardon, mistress! Noblemen, your pardon! This is the most noble Tros of Samothrace. His friend is a royal prince whose name is Orwic."

"Not a king?" Helene gasped in mock astonishment. "Lord Tros, that Greek fool told me *you* were no more than a sailor! Kings go to Rome's back-doors, but I see you are neither a fool of a king nor a louse with a vote for sale!"

Again she curtsied, three times, throwing back the dark hair from her forehead with a toss that suggested blossoms nodding in the wind. Then—

"*Equites!*" she cried, addressing the youths who had begun to swarm around her. "Favor me by entertaining them until I have bathed and dressed."

She ran off through a door between two Doric columns, followed by the women who had been surrounding Zeuxis. Zeuxis came forward again and introduced the Romans, reeling off their names as each one bowed with almost perfect insolence, restrained, however, within bounds by recognition of Tros' strength of character and muscle and his air of being somebody who might have influence. They tried to talk to Orwic, but, as he could not understand them and disguised embarrassment behind an air of aristocratic boredom, they were obliged by curiosity to turn to Tros again.

"I am from Spain," he answered, telling half the truth. "I have brought dispatches from your *imperator* Cæsar," he added, which was more than half an untruth. "To the senate? No. What should Cæsar say to the senate?"

They all laughed at that. Whatever their opinions of Cæsar, none pretended that he held the senate in respect. They began to ask news of Cæsar, eagerly inquiring what the prospect was of his invading Britain and how true it might be that the Britons made their common cooking-pots of gold. So Tros seized opportunity and told them about Britain, saying it was nothing but a miserable, foggy island full of trees, where no wealth was and the inhabitants fought valiantly because there was nothing to make peace endurable.

"Then why does Cæsar talk about invasion?" they protested.

"Possibly he talks of one thing and intends another," Tros retorted. "It is known that he prepares an army, and I have heard something about ships. However, which way will tomorrow's wind blow? How many miles from Gaul to Rome? If I were a young Roman I would watch to see where Pompey's eagles gather. These are wild times. Stranger things might happen than that Cæsar should propose to himself to seize the wealth of Rome."

But such talk only vaguely interested them. They had the absolute contempt for politics peculiar to rich men's sons. The youngest of them had seen the mob made use of to reduce itself into submission; they had all heard gossip about Cæsar, and they all considered Pompey vastly his superior. However, Cæsar had significance.

"Cæsar has sent three more shiploads of wild animals from Gaul," said one of them. "There are to be games to celebrate his recent victories. They are to surpass anything ever seen in the Circus Maximus. Crassus' agents have sent bears from Asia. There will be nine elephants. From Africa Jugurtha has sent fifty coal-black savages from the interior, who look fit to fight even our best gládiators. And there are two hundred and ten criminals in the dungeons, some of them women; they talk of slaughtering the lot in one mêlée—give them a taste of the hot iron, and a spear or something to defend themselves, then turn the wild beasts loose on them! There is rumor of a promise of freedom for the last man and the last woman left alive—but that may be only talk to make them try hard."

An older man, Servilius Ahenobarbus, waxed scornful of that gory prospect:

"I would rather see two good gladiators fight than watch a thousand people butchered," he objected. "Fie on you, Publius! Are you degenerating? Such stuff is all very well for the rabble. I can smell them in my nostrils as I think of it! Can't you hear the snarl and then the yelp as they watch women being ripped up by a bull? Cæsar has sent bulls from Spain, they tell me. But you omit the best part altogether—there are to be two days' chariot racing first."

"Phaugh! A safe and pretty spectacle for Vestal Virgins!" Publius sneered. "I have heard that Britons fix swords to their chariot wheels. Now, if they would have a race—*quadrigas*, say—with swords fixed to the wheels, wolves loosed at the horses and fifty or sixty prisoners of war in the way, tied in groups, to escape if they could, I would call that a spectacle! Wait until I am old enough and they elect me ædile!"

"Ah! Then at last my turn will come! You will let me fight then, won't you, Publius?"

Helene danced forth from her dressing-room in a *chlamys* made of Chinese silk from Alexandria, with a wreath of crimson flowers in her hair and a girdle that flashed fire as its opals caught the sunlight. She was better looking clothed; the drapery softened the lines of her too athletic figure and the wreath offset the hardness of her eyes—delicious dark-gray eyes that, nevertheless, could only half-conceal the calculation in their depths. She was mentally weighing Tros as Zeuxis had weighed nine pearls in his hand the night before.

She turned suddenly toward the Romans, laughing in their faces:

"*Nobiles*, who loves me? Who will hurry to the slave-market and buy Thracian grooms for my white team? Those Armenians I have are useless; I will sell them for farm-work."

There was a race to be first to find suitable Thracian slaves. The Roman youths cut short the courtesies and ran to find their chariots. Helene took Tros by the hand.

"And now those fools have gone we may talk wisdom," she said, looking almost modest. "Zeuxis tells me you have come from Britain and desire my influence—although I have not altogether understood him. Come."

SHE led into a room which formerly had been the atrium, which she had refurnished and disguised with hangings until it resembled nothing Tros had ever seen. There was crimson cloth with golden dragons; there were gilded cornices and curtains made from beads of ivory; the feet sank silently into rugs of amber and old-rose; the couches, the chairs and the very footstools were of ivory inlaid with gold. There was a smell of incense.

"Go!" she ordered, and the lurking slaves vanished.

Tros prodded the hangings. He opened a closet. He drew back the curtains that covered a doorway. He looked through the window and listened for breathing from behind some potted shrubbery through which he could not see. Then, striding to where she had thrown herself on an Egyptian couch of ivory and crimson cloth, he looked down at her dark eyes and, with his hands behind him, challenged her:

"I heard you say you wish to fight. Do you desire to fight me? With any weapon? With your wits?"

She shuddered.

"You look too much like Zeus himself!"

she answered, rallying her impudence. "I understood you came to ask a favor of me."

"Whose slave are you?" he demanded.

She sat upright suddenly. She tried to look indignant but her eyes betrayed her; there was fear in their depths. She nearly spat the answer at him.

"I was born free! I am the daughter of Theseus the musician—"

"And was Theseus free?"

She nodded. Words were choking in her throat. Her fingers moved as if she sought a weapon.

"Since when were the musicians at the court of Ptolemy free men?" Tros asked her. "I have seen you dancing at the court of Ptolemy. You are the girl who danced when Ptolemy Auletes played the flute. Are you Ptolemy's slave?"

"I am free!" she insisted. Coiled on the couch, looking up at him, she suggested a snake in the act of striking. All the laughter was gone from her eyes, all her impudence.

"I am a silent man," said Tros. "You shall confide in me. Then I will show you a reward that you may win. I listen."

He began to pace the floor, his hands behind him, presenting his broad back toward her as he turned, to give her time to recover her self-possession; but she had no sooner regained a little of it than he snatched it from her, to convert it to his own use.

"Understand!" He stood in front of her again. "No panic-stricken yielding that broods treachery! Use reason. Judge me, whether I am one whom you can sway; or whether I am one who will betray you, if you keep good faith."

"Master of men, you are cruel!"

"I am just," Tros answered. "I will do you no harm if you yield to me."

"My body?" Her eyes lighted; her lips quivered in the faint suggestion of a smile.

"That for it!" He snapped his fingers. Instantly her whole expression changed; resentful, sullen.

"What then?" she asked. "Yield what?"

"Out with your secret!"

"I have no secret. I am the daughter of—"

He stopped her with a gesture. "Shall I go?" he asked, and turned toward the door.

She flinched at the veiled threat—sprang from the couch and stood between him and the doorway.

"I have influence," she said. "I dare to fight you one way or the other! Knife against knife, or cunning against cunning! If we make a bargain, you shall keep your share of it."

Tros thrust his thumb into the little pocket in his tunic and drew out a pearl of the size of a pea—a rosy, lustrous thing that looked incongruous as he rolled it on the palm of his enormous hand. She curled her lip scornfully.

"I could have pearls from Pompey. I can have anything in Rome my heart desires."

But Tros produced another one, and then a third. Her eyes changed subtly, though she still defied him, standing like an Amazon at bay. Tros was watching her eyes.

"I gave nine like these to Zeuxis. You shall have eighteen of them."

"For my secret?"

"No. I know your secret. There is only one man who would dare to risk burning his fingers in your flame. You are Cæsar's spy."

"Liar! Rabirius sent me to Rome!"

Tros laughed aloud. He held the key to the situation now. Rabirius was Cæsar's moneylender—possibly a third as rich as Crassus, with perhaps a thirtieth of Crassus' manhood—an avaricious rat with brains enough to recognize his limitations and not vie with great men but play into their hands and pocket fabulous commissions.

"Sit down!" Tros commanded, pointing to the couch and returning the pearls to his pocket. Then, as she obeyed him, "Judge whether I know your secret."

She set her elbows on her knees and clasped her chin, staring at Tros as if he were a prophet reading off her destiny.

"Cæsar will need money—limitless fountains of money—when he makes his bid to be the master of the world. He invaded Gaul to make himself a reputation and for practise in playing off men against men. He married his daughter to Pompey to keep Pompey quiet. He encouraged Crassus to make war on Parthia, that Crassus might bleed Italy of men and leave none but Pompey and the idle rich to stand between him and ambition. Seeing far into the future, he sent agents into Egypt who should stir the Alexandrians against their king. So the Alexandrians drove out Ptolemy; but it was too soon; Cæsar was not ready. Who was it then but Cæsar

who, in return for a promise of seventeen million sesterces, agreed to defy the Roman senate and send Gabinius with troops from Syria to restore Ptolemy to the throne, along with Rabirius to control Ptolemy's exchequer? Now you say you are the agent of Rabirius. That may be. But I think you are the slave of Caius Julius Cæsar."

"What if I were? Is that your affair?" she answered.

"Aye! Cæsar might learn too easily what I intend! You may report to him about Rabirius. You may tell him all the secrets of these young patricians who babble their fathers' treacheries in your ears. But concerning me you will be as silent as the tomb in which they bury Vestal Virgins."

"Cæsar," she said, "is a terrible man to trifle with."

Tros nodded.

"Aye. I know him. He rewards, beats, crucifies. Strategically posted slaves keep watch on one another as well as on such Romans as he mistrusts and such provincials as he hopes to use. But since the gods, against my will, have guided me to your house, you shall run that risk of not informing Cæsar!"

"You will injure him?" she asked.

"Nay, I will save Britain and preserve him. Let him conquer Rome and leave the Britons to themselves!"

"You are his friend?"

"No more than you are Pompey's friend, whose profligate young cockerels you watch with such amusement! I am the friend of Caswallon, a king of the Britons. I am here to save Britain from Cæsar."

Helene stood up, laughing, her eyes blazing, and defied him:

"Do you dare to kill me in my own house? How else shall you gag me now I know your secret?"

"Gag you? I will make you garrulous!" Tros answered. "You shall find a way to make me famous in a city where such infamy abounds that no voice can be heard above the din! To Cæsar you shall say no word of me, except that Tros of Samothrace has prophesied Rome shall be Cæsar's. Truly that is my belief; and if he hears it, vanity will make him think he has persuaded me at last to love him."

"Many honest men love Cæsar," said Helene.

"Aye, and there are many who love you," Tros answered, "but not I. And though you fear me not yet, you shall have your choice of playing my game or explaining what you are, and why you are in Rome, to Cato. So now choose!"

"Cato?" she said. "Are you of Cato's party?"

"No," he answered, "but I have a speech for Cato's ear that shall include you one way or another. Shall I say you are the agent of Rabirius and Cæsar's spy—for I can prove it to him!—or—"

"You may say Helene is your friend," she answered. "Cato is a vain old fool, but he is dangerous."

She stood up. For a moment she looked keenly into Tros' eyes, and then laughed daringly, but with a little breathless catch of nervousness:

"Tros, there are few men in Rome who would not like to say Helene is—"

"I am one of those few," Tros interrupted.

"Did you never love a woman?" she asked—curiously; his blunt rejection of her offer pleased her. By the light in her gray eyes he knew she had made up her mind to conquer him, but being forewarned he was forearmed.

"I am of Samothrace. Initiates of Samothrace refrain from women."

"An initiate? You?" she asked, but he did not answer and she misinterpreted his silence.

"I will initiate you into deeper mysteries than Samothrace can show," she said with a confident toss of her chin and a laugh that had hypnotized many a man. "If I must trust you, you must trust me; and in trust lies the path to the stars. I think you are a greater one than Cæsar!"

"I have pearls. And you will do well to obey me," Tros retorted. "Be alone when I return from interviewing Cato."

CHAPTER IV

MARCUS PORCIUS CATO

NOWHERE on earth was it easier to make mistakes than in Rome, nor more difficult to recover from them. It was a city where a man might do almost anything, including murder, with impunity, provided only that he went about it according to precedent and did lip-service to the institutions and conventions on which

Rome's claims to dignity were based. Above all, a foreigner needed discretion. Too often foreigners had trailed behind the chariots of Roman generals, in the celebration of those triumphs over foreigners that made Rome affluent; too many thousands of alien slaves were doing the work of animals and pandering to Rome's depravity; it was too usual to attribute treachery to foreigners in order to provide excuse for new campaigns, and it behooved the alien to study his deportment shrewdly, with an eye not only to the mob's continuously cultivated craving for excitement, but also to the prejudices of the privileged—since privilege was of the essence of Rome's government.

Aware of all that, nevertheless, Tros fell immediately foul of custom. Wishing to avoid curiosity that Orwic, with his fair mustache and unusual manners, almost certainly would have aroused, and lacking other means of transportation, he accepted the use of Helene's litters and her personal attendants to convey him to the Forum, where Zeuxis assured him he would almost certainly find Cato.

He was conscious of having offended Zeuxis by not permitting him to overhear the conversation with Helene and he knew the Greek's mercurial temperament, as capable of malice as of generosity and of leaping in a moment from one extreme to its opposite; but he did not expect Zeuxis' resentment to be quite so swift, and the malicious smile with which Zeuxis watched him get into the extravagantly decorated litter made no impression on him at the time.

"You will cause quite a flutter in Cato's bosom. There is nothing like a favorable introduction!" said the Greek.

And for a while it looked as if Zeuxis had meant exactly what he said. As the litters approached the city they became the objects of such attention that the liveried slaves had hard work to make progress through the crowd. Helene's notoriety had not been lessened, nor her popularity diminished by the recent brawling in the Forum for the right to walk beside her litter through the streets. Her recent offer to fight with net and trident in the Circus Maximus had become common gossip but it had been nobody's affair to circulate the news that the authorities had instantly forbidden such a scandalous proceeding. The crowd wanted to be scandalized and gloated at the prospect of Helene's doing it.

It was known, too, that she had a four-horse team to enter in the races that would precede the three days' butchery of men and beasts in the arena; and the possibility that she might drive the team herself had raised her popularity to fever-heat. The mere sight of her well-known litter forcing its way toward the Capitol was enough to block the narrow streets and draw attention even from the orators who were trying to work the crowd into electioneering frenzy wherever there was room for fifty men to stand and listen.

It was easy to see out through the litter-curtains, although next thing to impossible to recognize the litter's occupant, so all the way to the Forum Tros received the adulation that would have amused and thrilled Helene to the marrow of her being. It disgusted Tros. He loathed it. It revolted him to have to use a woman's notoriety to further his own plans, and although pageantry was second-nature to him and he loved to tread life's stage with a dramatic dignity, Helene's popularity and dignity were not associated in his mind. He could be tolerant of any frailty as long as its indignities were not imposed upon himself, but the instant he felt himself caught in its contaminating toils ill-temper seized him, weakening his judgment.

Then the stifling city smells annoyed him and the din of city traffic—street-vendors' cries, the tumult of electioneering factions skilfully incited to frenzy by men whose only claim to public office was cupidity and the ability to pay the necessary bribes, yells of the charioteers who found the street blocked, clangor of the armorers in dim basement workshops, hoarse pleadings of the auctioneers disposing of the loot from far-off provinces, shouts of the public announcers, the yelping of dogs and the overtone, blended of all of it:

"Buy! Buy! Buy!"

Rome was for sale to the craftiest bidder. That was the key to the din, and the offspring of seventy races were hawking their hearts in the market, to go under the same stroke of the hammer to the buyer with the keenest brain and longest pocketbook.

Midsummer heat had driven all who could afford it to the seaside or to mountain villas—that, and bedbugs incubated in the crowded, dark slave-quarters and the rack-rent tenements. The orators were well dressed, and there were *equites* in dusty

chariots arriving post-haste from the country to investigate alarming rumors, but the crowd had the shabby, ill-tempered appearance it assumes so swiftly when the fashionable element withdraws. Hot nights and too much politics—slaves overworked and free-men unemployed—enormous and increasing wealth of one class, poverty and irresponsibility increasing for the other—corn-doles, open bribery, free entertainment at the expense of demagogues—postponement of the elections because the senate was afraid of mob-rule—Cæsar's agrarian laws designed to curry favor with the populace, and the impossibility of enforcing them in the face of the landowners' opposition or of earning a living on the land in competition with the cheap slave-labor of the large estates, had all combined to arouse irritation, uncertainty and the expectation of a riot such as Rome had never seen. Almost the air itself seemed ready to take fire. Men's faces wore the ugly look that precedes violence.

AND Rome herself was ugly—drab with the color of smoky bricks and vegetable refuse—ugliness enhanced by the beginnings of adornment. There was marble here and there; and there were statues, some decapitated, some half hidden under crudely smeared electioneering posters, that suggested dignity forgotten. From between its ugly wooden scaffolding the marble of Pompey's enormous new theatre shone in the baking sunlight, hinting at the only method by which Rome was likely to emerge out of her filth. It was against the law to build a theatre of anything but wood; so, as all men knew, including they who should enforce the law, Pompey was building behind screens of wood that should be torn down in a night at last and lay bare a magnificent defiance of the law. And all men knew that there was none, unless possibly Cato, would dare to call Pompey in question; men laughed at the senate's helplessness, while they reviled the senate for not fostering tradition.

As the litters neared the Forum, where the shop-fronts and the open wine-shops looked drab in the dust from buildings being torn down by Cæsar's agents and the thud of falling masonry resounded like the tumult of a siege, the crowd grew denser. Roofs, temple steps, the shop-fronts, upper windows, all were thronged with agitated sight-seers, some crying out the names of candidates for public office, some reviling Cato, others—evidently led by unseen agents—shouting for Pompeius Magnus and dictatorship.

The crowd was so dense that even two lictors preceding a prætor's deputy were brought to a halt. Rather than challenge the crowd in that temper they preferred to follow the two litters, for which the crowd made way. They recognized Helene's livery and there began to be an ovation. One of those strange moods that capture crises spread like a contagion; there was humor in the thought of honoring Helene, who had to stay at home three days because of gross infractions of the public peace of which she was the cause, and of dishonoring the prætor's representative.

The crowd, it seemed, was there to vilify the prætor—to inspire him with such dread as should prevent him from interfering with electioneering bribery. They began yelping at the lictors and at the scared official who strode behind them with his toga concealing the lower half of his face. Then suddenly some genius conceived the thought that Helene had been arrested and was being brought before the prætor for examination. Mockery turned to anger. That was interference with the citizens' amusement and intolerable.

"Rescue her!"

The shout came from an upper window. It was echoed by a hundred voices from the street. Stones began flying, picked from the débris of the houses Cæsar's agents were demolishing. An angry faction, seizing opportunity to pounce on their political opponents, surged between the litters and the prætor's representative and in a second there was a street-fight raging. The two lictors, theoretically sacred in their persons, raised their fasces over the official's head and hurried him to safety in the nearest house, while a troop of young patricians, asking nothing better than excuse to terrorize the mob, charged on horseback from a side-street in the direction of the Capitol. They were only armed with daggers but they swept the mob in front of them, and in a sort of back-eddy formed by that onslaught the two litters swayed into the Forum, where the bearers set them down beside a statue on which men swarmed and around which sweating men were packed like herrings in a barrel.

Tros emerged out of the litter and by sheer strength scuffled himself standing-room. He shouted to Orwic to stay where he was, but the Briton followed suit and at the risk of daggers fought his way beside him. They were facing the temple of Castor and Pollux, whose platform was thronged with patricians, one of whom was trying to address the crowd while others roared for silence, and no single word could be distinguished from the din. There was a sea of arms and hot, excited faces where the patricians tried to win the mob's attention; and on the opposite side of the Forum, where the shutters had been raised on money-changers' windows and every statue held its crowd of men like corpses on a gibbet, other orators were roaring themselves hoarse. There were cries of—

"Who defeated Spartacus?"

"Pompeius Magnus! Let him be dictator!"

"Who conquered Asia?"

"Pompeius Magnus!"

"Down with Cato! He assails our liberties!"

"Cæsar! Caius Julius Cæsar! The most generous, the most capable, the most glorious—Cæsar! Cæsar! Memmius!"

The last was Cæsar's candidate for consul.

Cheers, groans, cat-calls drowned the efforts of each faction to popularize their favorite. There were scuffles and fist-fights going on in thirty places simultaneously, but there was no room for a general mêlée; public peace was preserved by the utter impossibility of concerted action where men were fainting for lack of breathing room and could not rally to their friends or reach their enemies. A young patrician, standing high above the crowd's reach on the balustrade that flanked the temple platform was amusing himself by flinging copper coins, but none dared stoop to pick them up for fear of being trampled underfoot. Six others in a group yelled "fire!" to try to cause a stampede, but that failed because it was impossible to move in any direction.

The only uninvaded steps were those of the prætor's office, guarded by a row of lictors, whose fasces, vertically held in front of them, were still such sacred symbols of Rome's majesty as even that crowd dared not violate. The building, wedged between the massive temple of Castor and Pollux and a smaller one, more delicately built, that showed the influence of Greece, was blunt, uncompromisingly Roman, dignified and solid, raised above the level of the Forum on a concrete base that formed the platform and provided cells for prisoners as well as offices. Its brick-work, unadorned since Sulla's day when the stucco had been damaged in the rioting and afterward removed entirely, gave a gloomy, ancient aspect to the building that was only partially brightened by the stucco columns recently erected to support a roof over the platform. On wooden boards on either side of the open door were public proclamations, and on the platform was a table and a chair, but no man seated at it. That platform was the only vacant space in sight; even the bronze beaks of the rostra, at the Forum's farther end, were invisible behind a swaying sea of faces.

SUDDENLY the din ceased. There was silence as if Rome had caught her breath. The hammering of demolition stopped abruptly and the dense crowd swayed as every face was turned toward the door of the prætorium.

"Cato!"

It was a murmur, but it filled the Forum. He came slowly through the open door, the purple border of his toga emphasizing the dignity and matter-of-factness of his stride. He had a tablet in his right hand, which he studied, hardly glancing at the crowd, and he appeared entirely to ignore the half-a-dozen men who followed him and took their stand a little behind him, three on either hand; he was a round-headed, obstinate looking veteran, in contrast to their elegance and air of self-advertisement; the more they postured and acknowledged themselves conscious of the crowd, the greater seemed his dignity.

"Citizens!" he said abruptly. Even breathing ceased. There was a dead, flat silence—non-committal. No man seemed to expect pleasantries. "It is your inalienable privilege to elect the officials of the Republic by ballot. However, certain individuals, ambitious to hold office for their private gain, have set the disgraceful example of bribery, corrupting public morals and preventing the election of such candidates as will not, for the sake of honesty, or can not purchase votes. This scandal I regard it

as my duty to abolish. There shall be no bribery while I am prætor. I have caused to be deposited with me by each of these candidates for office whom you see before you a sum of money from his private fortune which would ruin any of them should he forfeit it. This money will be forfeited into the coffers of the state in the event of proof of bribery. So cast your ballots at the time of the elections honorably, as becomes a Roman citizen, each voting for that candidate who seems to him to merit confidence."

He made no gesture—simply turned, looked sharply at the six men on the platform, and strode sturdily in through the door.

There was a moment's silence, then a man laughed. Agitators, scattered at strategic intervals, accepted laughter as the antidote and cackled cynically until all the crowd was laughing. Concerted cries from over near the rostra broke on the babeling din:

"This upstart believes he is Cato the Censor! He will abolish the games next! He will have us all eating turnips and wearing sack-cloth!"

But the crowd, as volatile as mercury, had seen the humor of the situation and it turned its laughter on the candidates for office, booing them until they followed Cato in a hurry. There was a surge then as men were hustled off the rostra to make room for orators who sought with shout and gesture to claim the crowd's attention. But the mob would have none of them; it began melting, pouring along the Via Sacra, spreading the news of Cato's masterstroke and carrying the din of laughter down the narrow streets until all Rome seemed aroar with monstrous humor. Before Tros could straighten out his clothing, mussed by the crush of the crowd, the whole Forum was empty except for groups of arguing politicians. All except two of the lictors retired, and they sat at ease on stools on either side of the prætorium door.

"They are used to squalls—well used to them!" said Tros, and taking Orwic by the arm he bade the litter-bearers follow him to the prætorium steps and wait there.

As he reached the top step he met Cato face to face. The Roman, with only one slave following, stopped, framed in the doorway and stared at him hard, then glanced at the sumptuous litters and their slaves in Egyptian livery.

"Those slaves are better dressed than many a Roman," he remarked, with a sarcastic gesture answering Tros' salute. "Who are you?"

"Prætor, I am Tros of Samothrace. I seek audience with you alone."

Cato's florid, stubborn face grew wrinkled as a dry smile stole along his lips.

"You are an alien," he said. "You think the business of Rome may wait while I listen to your importunities?"

"Aye, let Rome wait!" Tros answered. "Cæsar has the reins of fortune in his hand."

"You are Cæsar's messenger?" asked Cato.

"I am Tros of Samothrace and no man's messenger. I seek an audience with you."

"Enter."

Cato turned his back on him and led the way along a narrow passage into a square room lined with racks on which state documents were filed with parchment labels hanging from them. There were several chairs, two tables and one secretary, bowed over a manuscript. Cato dismissed the secretary, stared at Tros again, glanced suddenly at Orwic and sat down, with a gesture of his head toward two vacant chairs.

"Be brief," he said abruptly.

But Tros made no haste. He studied him, mistrusting ordinary means of making a communication. There was nothing subtle about Cato; the man's elementary simplicity and downrightness expressed themselves in every line of him. His windy gray eyes, steady and keenly intelligent, betrayed unflinching will. His wrinkles spoke of hard experience. The iron-gray hair, worn short, suggested a pugnacity that was confirmed by the lines of mouth and chin. His hands, laid calmly on his knees, were workmanlike, unjeweled, strong—incapable of treachery; the voice, well modulated, courteous but carrying a note of irony and incredulity.

A little too much bluntness and the man would construe it as a challenge; but the merest hint of subtlety and he would close his mind. Too much politeness certainly would stir suspicion; rudeness he would take as an affront to Roman dignity. Exaggeration he would instantly discredit; under-statement he would construe literally. He was difficult. Tros would have preferred a man more vulnerable to emotion.

"I AM from Britain," Tros remarked at last. "This is a prince of Britain." He nodded to Orwic, who rose and saluted with aristocratic dignity.

"You have come in very gaudy litters," Cato answered. "Whose are they?"

"Helene's. Lacking other means of—"

"Can't you walk?" asked Cato. "I am prætor. I invariably walk."

"I can walk when I will," Tros answered. "But having no lictors to make me a way through the crowd I did well to borrow litters that the crowd let pass. It is of no importance how I came. I will speak of Cæsar."

"You carry tales against him? I have heard them all," said Cato.

He closed his mouth tight, as a man does when he reins impatient horses.

"I come to prevent Cæsar from invading Britain," Tros insisted, leaning forward to watch Cato's eyes. "If he succeeds against the Britons, what will be his next move? Rome."

Cato nodded.

"Cæsar," he said, "is the first sober man who has designed to make himself the master of Rome. Sulla was a drunkard. So was Marius. Cæsar drinks deep of the hog-swill of flattery. He is drunk with ambition. But that does not give you the right to conspire against the Republic."

"I will help you against Cæsar!" Tros said, rising, and began to pace the floor, as always when he felt excitement surging in his veins. Three times he strode the room's full length and back again, his hands behind him, and then stood, looking into Cato's face.

"Alien," said Cato, "I am prætor. Cæsar is a Roman general."

Tros snorted.

"You split hairs of morality while Cæsar cuts throats! Listen! You love Rome, and you hate Cæsar. But not I. I haven't Rome to lose nor all the plunder of a hundred provinces to make me fearful. You set the welfare of the state above your own. I set the welfare of my friends above my own; and I love Britain, where a king lives whom I helped to resist Cæsar when he made his first raid on the island."

"Island?" said Cato. "We are told it is a mainland greater than all Gaul and Spain."

"Mainland!" Tros snorted again. "A small, misty, wooded island, whose inhabitants can neither harm Rome nor enrich her treasury! A mere island, whose inhabitants are brave men. Cæsar, while he gains time, seeks to build a reputation. But I have heard how Cato, staunchest of all Romans, resolutely sets his face against wars when there is no excuse for war. They say there is no other public man who has dared to defy the Triumvirate. Therefore, I have made my way to Cato, at my own great risk."

"And the price?" asked Cato, looking sourly at him.

Tros exploded like a grampus coming up for air, then turned and paced the floor again.

"Cato!" he said, turning on him suddenly. "They packed you off to Cyprus to get rid of you, and all the world knows what happened. You found an island ruined by the money-lenders, and you left it in a fair way to recover. I have heard how you flung the taunt in Pompey's face that, notwithstanding you dealt honestly, you brought more money back from Cyprus for the Roman treasury than Pompey brought from all his plundering of Asia. So you know what Roman rule means in the conquered provinces. I tell you, I have seen Gaul writhing under Cæsar's heel. Where I have known fair cities, there is wasted land and broken walls. I know a place where there are sixty thousand men who lack a right hand, simply because Cæsar is ambitious. I have seen the gangs of slaves go trailing out of Gaul to replace Romans on the farms of Italy and force your free men to enlist in Cæsar's and Crassus' legions. And you ask me my price?"

Cato eyed him undisturbed, his hands palms downward on his knees. No gesture, not a fleeting trace of an expression betrayed what thought was passing through his mind.

"Give me the right to call myself Cato's friend!" Tros urged, lowering his voice dramatically. "If I thought Rome held a hundred Catos, I would—"

Cato interrupted.

"Your opinion of me is unimportant. I am the prætor. That woman, Helene, whose litters you use, is a prostitute. You flaunt her impudence in Rome's face."

"Prostitute?" Tros retorted. "All Rome is given over to prostitution! What does one more matter? I am told you wish to

prosecute Rabirius for his chicanery in Egypt. Leave Helene to me and I will strip Rabirius as naked as when he yelled himself into the world! I will prove to you Cæsar supported him, prompted him, pocketed a fat percentage of the money he stole and now makes use of Helene to watch Rabirius—and you—and others. She is one of Cæsar's ablest spies. Touch her, and you bring down Cæsar on your head! Leave her to me, and I will hamstring Cæsar! Give me ten days, and you shall know about the war that Cæsar plans!"

Cato took a tablet from the table and wrote swiftly. Then he laid the tablet back, face downward on the table.

"Cæsar has authority," he said, "to declare war or to make peace in Gaul."

"Britain is not Gaul," Tros answered. "Neither is Rome Gaul!"

Cato rapped the table with his knuckles. The secretary entered, took the tablet and went out again.

"Cæsar has reported to the senate," said Cato, "that the Britons are constantly helping the Gauls to rebel."

"In the name of all the gods, why not?" Tros thundered at him. "Should a brother not defend his brother? There are Gauls and Britons who belong to the same tribe, share the same king and till land on both sides of one narrow sea. And did your ancestor sit idle when Hannibal invaded Italy, because forsooth, he had not yet reached Rome? Do you, another Cato, wish to grovel before Cæsar? He will use the strength of Gaul and Britain against Rome, when he has glutted his ambition in that corner of the world. He is a madman! Stir up Gaul behind him! Let Gauls and Britons learn that there are men in Rome who sympathize. Give them but that much encouragement"—he snapped his fingers—"and Cæsar shall have his hands full!"

CATO, spreading out his knees with both hands resting on them, leaned back; he had done with arguing.

"No Roman prætor can lend his influence to the defeat of Roman arms," he said. "But I will do what can be done to bring the senate to a proper view of these things—"

"*Phaugh!*" Tros' fist went like a thunder-clap into his palm. "And two-thirds of the senators accepting Cæsar's bribes! The other third opposing him because they think Pompey might put more money in their pockets! Cato, do you set this wolf-brood's appetites above fair dealing? Are you—"

"I am a Roman," Cato interrupted.

"You shall see Rome fawning at Cæsar's feet!" Tros answered, his eyes glowing like a lion's.

The line of Cato's lips grew tighter and then flickered in a hard smile.

"And by whose authority do you come here, riding in prostitutes' litters to hurl threats at me?" he asked. "Are you a Roman citizen?"

"I come by Cæsar's leave," Tros answered, pulling out a parchment from his breast. He flourished it indignantly. He showed the seal and signature. "I won it! Three times I have had the best of Cæsar and—"

He checked himself, aware that he had lost his self-control, whereas the Roman had not.

"Well—and what?" asked Cato.

But the thought that had flashed across Tros' mind was nothing he could safely tell to any one of Cato's unimaginative temper; even in the heat of indignation he knew better than to run that risk.

"And I will save Britain from him," he said lamely. Then, recovering his self-possession, "You go, prattle to the senate—if you can make them listen without paying them to sit still!"

He saluted in the Roman fashion and Cato stood up to return the salute with an air of being glad the interview was over. He ignored Orwic—merely nodded to him, as he might have done to a familiar slave, and Orwic flushed, not being used to rudeness even from his equals. As they left the room the Briton growled in Tros' ear—

"Is that truly one of Rome's great men?"

"Rome's greatest! Iron-headed, and as blind as a boulder resisting the sea! Born out of his time! He loves the Rome that died before the days of Marius and he is mad enough to think Cæsar can be tamed by quoting law! I have a thought, though."

For a minute Tros stood gazing at the forum and its groups of politicians vehemently gesturing. Helene's eunuch bowed. He waved the man away.

"I will walk. Here—" He tossed him money. "Tell your mistress to expect me." Then, as he took Orwic's arm and they descended the steps together, "I have a

thought that quarrels with inclination. I must study it. Keep silence."

Side by side they walked along the Via Sacra between rows of graceless statues, Orwic copying the stride that gave the Romans dignity when dignity of motive was the last thing in their minds. Tros strode like Hercules, observing nothing, with a frown above his eyes like brooding thunder.

"Of what do you think?" Orwic asked him at last, when they had bumped into so many people that apology had grown monotonous.

"Of my father's prophecy," Tros answered. "With his dying breath he foretold I should struggle against Cæsar but that I should serve him in the end."

"Against Britain?" Orwic asked, startled, puzzled.

"Nay. He knew I will betray no friendships. But—why not against Rome? Do you and I care whether Rome licks Cæsar's feet? This Tiber-wolf bred Cæsar—let the cub's teeth make her suffer for it! If we offer Rome to Cæsar he may turn his fangs away from Britain!"

"If we offer he will laugh at us," said Orwic. "How can two-and-thirty men give Rome away?"

"The gods give and the gods take," Tros retorted. "Men are agents of the gods."

"But who knows what the gods intend?"

Tros turned that over in his mind a minute, doubting nothing except whether words could possibly convey his meaning to a man whose language he had learned but recently.

"The gods—they know," he said at last. "Men guess. And he who guesses rightly there and then becomes the edged tool of the gods."

"But how guess?" Orwic wondered. "If we had a Druid with us—"

"He could tell us no more than we see," Tros interrupted. "Let us see Rome. If the heart is rotten, let us foretell death or a physician. I believe the gods purge evil with its offspring, and it may be Rome is ripe for Cæsar, who will be a drench that will burn Rome's belly. He may fail. She may vomit him out. She may swallow and smother him. Murder—"

"But—but—"

Orwic stared at the crowd—three-fifths of them slaves from the ends of the earth—for the Romans were taking their ease in the midsummer heat. Even the half empty streets sent up a roar like the voice of a cauldron, and the baking heat suggested future on the forge. There was a thunder where the rubbish of demolished buildings tumbled down the wooden chutes into the carts. The sun shone through a haze of dust and, as the wind whipped up a cloud of it, there came down a narrow street, like specters, nearly a hundred men all chained together, staggering under blocks of marble.

"Those are Jews," said Tros. "They are the fruit from Pompey's harvest in Jerusalem. Unless you and I act wisely we shall see Caswallon led in triumph, and the Britons building Cæsar's Rome under the whip."

He was talking merely to keep Orwic silent. He wanted to think. He stood frowning, staring at the most dignified building in old Rome—the temple of the goddess Vesta, with the residence of the Vestal Virgins close beside it and, beyond that, the official home of the Pontifex Maximus.

CHAPTER V

JULIUS NEPOS

TROS led on, ignoring the crowd; but even in polyglot Rome there were limits to the strangeness that could pass without exciting notice. If they had been slaves no citizen would have lowered himself by paying them attention, but they took the middle of the way like noblemen, although no servants followed to protect them from assault or from the importunities of wounded veterans.

So they were followed by small boys, who mimicked Tros' herculean swagger and made mustaches for themselves of street dirt out of compliment to Orwic. Traders tried to drag them into shops where Crassus' oriental plunder was beginning to seek sale. They were bellowed at by leather-lunged slaves who stood on stone blocks advertizing brothels. Insolent gangs of gladiators in the pay of men grown newly rich called to them out of the wine shops, where maimed ex-soldiers clamored for the dregs of each man's drink. They were pestered by touts from lawless gambling-dens, thieves' auctions and even by slaves who were trying to sell themselves.

It was hours before Zeuxis found them, still wandering about Rome, visiting the temples and the great wooden arenas where the gladiators practised, under the eyes of gamblers studying their chances and the betting odds. Zeuxis arrived on foot, sweat running from him, breathless and so agitated he could hardly speak. His slaves supported him, wiping his face with handkerchiefs until he thrust them aside at last and, stepping between Tros and Orwic, seized Tros' arm.

"What have you done? What have you done? One day in Rome and this already! They have seized Helene! She was taken by the prætor's men! They wrapped her in a hood for fear the crowd might recognize her. One of her slaves followed and declares he saw her hustled into the prætor's prison. There is a guard put on her house and men are searching it! A few of her slaves have run, but most of them are lined up in the garden, telling all they know. It was by the merest luck the prætor's men did not find me in the house—I had just left. One of the slaves escaped and overtook me. I have found you by describing you to people in the street and—gods of Hellas!—what a wanderer you are! I have followed you all over Rome."

Tros tried to calm him, but the Greek appeared to have no nerve left. He said he did not even dare to return home until he knew the prætor's men were not invading his house. He had sent a slave to see.

"They have no right to interfere with me—I am a Roman citizen, but a man's rights— Tros, Tros, you have brought me ill luck!"

"Where shall we go?" Tros asked him, for a crowd was gathering. "If they should find my Northmen at your house—"

"That's it, that's it!" exclaimed Zeuxis, wringing his hands. "Your wretched, bearded, battle-axing, drunken, quarrelsome barbarians! The prætor will accuse me of—here, this way!"

Slapping a slave's wrist, who tried to calm him with affectionate remonstrances, he slipped through the crowd and led, panic-stricken, down a dozen evil-smelling lanes where the rubbish from the tenements was dumped and mangy dogs snarled at the passer-by, until at last an alley opened into a nearly circular space that had been repaved with rubble from an ancient wall. There was a well in the center, protected by masonry constructed from the fragments of crude statuary, and though the buildings around the inclosure were tidy enough and there were no heaps of stinking garbage, they were mean, small, solidly and crudely built, with heavy, flat stones instead of arches over all the doors. It was a section of the oldest part of Rome.

Zeuxis struck at a door whose cypress planks were scarred by a hundred years of violence. He struck repeatedly, but faces peered through many a narrow window before the door was opened cautiously and a man thrust out his head. He had iron-gray whiskers that met underneath his chin. Chin and upper-lip were shaven. His nose was discolored by criss-cross purple veins. Extremely bright eyes glittered from under shaggy brows and his gray head, bald in the middle, was like a tangled mop.

"Zeuxis?" he said, "volatile, venomous, vicious, effeminate—enter! You would never come unless you were in trouble! Come in and amuse me. I suppose you have offended Cato. I know Cato better than to try to coax him, but you may as well tell me the news—the news—the news."

His voice echoed under the vaulted ceiling of a passage lighted dimly by one candle stuck on an iron bracket. On the walls of the passage were weapons, shields, helmets; some seemed to have come from the ends of the earth; there were Parthian scimiters, clubs studded with iron, three-headed spears and wave-edged daggers, long-handled hooks for dragging down a horseman, nets, tridents and swords by the dozen, of every imaginable shape and length.

Fire glowed on a hearth in a room at the end of the passage. There was something cooking on the coals and acrid smoke, that made the eyes smart, clouded among beams from which hung odds and ends of recently washed clothing. On the walls of the room hung garments of extraordinary richness, gruesomely suggestive of the spoils of horrible victories — more weapons — and a brazier in a corner, with an iron of peculiar shape beside it. Over the hearth, where smoky images of wax stood on a shelf in gloom, was an extremely heavy, short, broad-bladed sword. There were benches and a table, but the furniture was meager, unpainted and such as the poorest citizen of Rome might have possessed.

"I INTRODUCE you to Julius Nepos," said Zeuxis, seeming to recover self-possession when the old man slammed the door and bolted it. The only light came from the smoky hearth and from a window, high up in the wall, which seemed to open on a courtyard. The heat was so great that the candles set on brackets on the walls had drooped in drunken curves and there was tallow on the flag-stone floor beneath them.

Tros bowed and Orwic copied him, but both men felt an impulse of reserve. Old Nepos noticed it.

"Be seated," he said gruffly. "I have cut the heads off nobler men than you. I have slain kings."

He seemed to think that made him anybody's equal. He glanced at the garments that hung on the walls—his perquisites; and having laid claim to distinction, he grew genial and grinned—pulled off his sandals and shirt, revealing a torso and arms like Vulcan's, all lumpy with muscle, the color of bronze, and sat down on a creaking bench.

"This is the man," said Zeuxis, "who refused to be Sulla's headsman and yet Sulla spared him. He was formerly the chief instructor of the public gladiators, and not even Sulla dared to—"

"Oh yes, he did," Nepos interrupted. "He deprived me of my privileges. I might have starved; only when Cato became prætor he ordered Sulla's informers rounded up; and then he sent for me and had me cut the heads off most of them—a miserable brood! —nine-and-thirty in one afternoon, and a pleasanter death than they earned! If Cato had listened to me they would have died in the arena, fighting one another, with the beasts to clean up the survivors; but Cato thought they were too cowardly, although I told him a hot iron will make anybody fight. So I beheaded them. I killed two hundred and eleven altogether, and good riddance!"

His face looked something like a satyr's as he leaned forward to observe Tros. There were no signs of ferocity about him—rather of a philosophic humor, slightly cynical but tolerant. He struck the table with his fist and called for wine, which was brought in by a woman less agreeable to look at than himself. She had thick lips and most of her teeth were missing; her figure was shapeless, her arms like a fighting man's and her greasy gray hair like Medusa's. But it was good wine; and she provided lumps of bread to eat with it, breaking them off from the loaf with fingers that looked capable of tearing throats.

"And so now you are in trouble," remarked Nepos, eying Zeuxis comically. "You believe because I am a friend of Cato I can get you out of it. Isn't that so? Well, I tell you, Cato doesn't like you, Zeuxis. Has he caught you cheating the public treasury over some contract for a spectacle?"

"He has arrested Helene," said Zeuxis.

Nepos suddenly sat upright, swallowed wine and snapped his mouth shut.

"So it is Cato who is in trouble, is it?" he said. "Obstinate old tamperer with hot irons! Fool! She'll wreck him! The mob loves her. What will he do—have her thrown to the beasts? Old imbecile! They'd leave the benches and throw Cato in in place of her! There are some things Cato can't do, prætor though he is."

"How teach him?" wondered Zeuxis.

"Oh, he's teachable," said Nepos. "You couldn't have taught Sulla anything, or Marius—and Pompey won't learn nowadays, since flattery went to his head. But you can teach Cato what the crowd will have and what it won't have. Cato believes in the voice of the people. He'll hear it! As I've told him often, all they care for is money, doles of corn and entertainment. Cato sat there, on that bench, last night. He likes me because I talk good sense and never flatter him.

"I like Cæsar, who knows how to rule; but I told Cato now is the time to throw in his lot with Pompey, and increase corn-doles and give astonishing spectacles, if he hopes to stand in Cæsar's way. But Cato hates Pompey nearly as much as he does Cæsar, so that's mutual. Pompey detests him for going bare-footed and poking his nose into public accounts. So he has bagged Helene, has he? Well, we'll have to save him from that predicament! You can't tell me Helene isn't Cæsar's woman. Cæsar can't afford to let his spies become disorganized. He'll kill Cato! He hates him. He'd love an opportunity to turn on him. Cato is a fool. I love him better than a brother, but he's a fool—he's a fool—he's an old fool—and that's worse than a young one!"

Zeuxis shrugged his shoulders.

"He is honest, which is much the same thing!"

"No, he isn't," said Nepos. "He is

proud and obstinate. There's no such thing as honesty."

There came a hammering at the outer door and Nepos' wife admitted one of Zeuxis' slaves, who delivered his news breathlessly:

"The prætor's men have not come near the house. But the freedman Conops went to Ostia, so now there is none who can control the lord Tros' barbarians, who are afraid because of their master's absence and are threatening to go and look for him."

Instantly Julius Nepos seemed to throw off twenty years. His muscles tautened. Even his voice grew younger:

"Barbarians? What sort?" he asked. He glanced shrewdly at Orwic, who resented the appraisal and frowned haughtily. Tros sat still, acutely conscious of a tingling in his spine. It was Zeuxis who answered:

"Northmen—whatever that is. They are a breed never before seen in Rome, having red beards; and they fight with axes. But some are Britons and resemble Gauls. That one—" he pointed at Orwic— "is a prince among the Britons."

"Are they free men?" Nepos asked.

Instantly Tros lied to save them. If he had answered they were free men, nothing would have been more simple than to bring some charge against them. Then, as aliens unrepresented by an influential advocate, they might be condemned and sentenced to the arena.

"SLAVES," he remarked, compelling his voice to sound casual. But his fist was clenched and Nepos noticed it.

"I have seen too many die, not to know when a man is afraid, friend Tros," he said, a lean smile on his lips. "Good gladiators bring a high price. Men who fight with axes would be something new. They might be matched against the Mauritanians. Pompey would buy them. It would be a short way into Pompey's favor. That way we could approach Pompey, who is difficult to reach. We might persuade him; he would be glad to make trouble for Cato. And by releasing Helene he would again put Cæsar at a disadvantage."

Zeuxis chuckled. He had not forgiven Tros for speaking with Helene privately, and now danger from the prætor's men was added to the first offense. Incapable of friendship, he was bent on profit and on retaliating for the injury to his self-esteem. His superficial subtlety was stirred by Nepos' argument; he saw all sides of it, if not the inside.

"Dionysus! Excellent! Nothing ever was more accurate! Julius Nepos, you are fit to govern Rome, you understand Pompey and Cæsar so well! Tros—have you not understood him? Pompey and Cæsar lavish favors on each other, while they watch each other like cat and dog. Each hopes to be able to accuse the other of ingratitude when the time comes that they quarrel openly at last. Pompey will compel Cato to set Helene free, and he will tell all Rome he did it to oblige Cæsar. He likes nothing better than to get Cato into difficulties with the Roman mob, because he knows that if it weren't for Cato's blunders and lack of tact the old man might be dangerous. Pompey will jump at it! Sell him your Northmen, Tros!"

Zeuxis leaned back and enjoyed the alarm that Tros could not conceal. His subtlety enabled him to understand that Tros would rather die than betray his men, although Zeuxis himself was untainted by any such virtue. He was aware, too, that the Northmen were not slaves; and, what was even better to the purpose, he knew Nepos—understood the old man's combination of ferocity and amiable instinct.

But Tros' subtlety could under-dig the Greek's. He was at bay. He had his men to save, which stirred his wits. And he was not afraid Zeuxis would utterly betray him so long as there were pearls to be obtained by other means than downright treachery.

"The notion is good," he said, rising. "I will visit Pompey. Where is he?"

"As I told you, his wife is ill. You will have to drive out to his country villa, where senators wait at the gate like slaves for the chance of a word with him."

"No," said Nepos. "Pompey comes to Rome tonight. How do I know? Never mind. There are those who must go to Pompey and beg favors; but there are others whom not even Pompey the Great dares refuse if they send for him, no matter at what hour."

"The Vestal Virgins," Zeuxis said, and shuddered. "May the gods protect us from entanglements with them! This mob, that worships venery, adores those virgins and will kill you if they frown. But what should Pompey have to do with them?"

"Doubtless he brings gifts. Possibly he begs a favor for his wife," said Nepos; but he did not look as if he thought that was the reason. He was sly-eyed.

"Where will he lodge?" Tros asked him.

"In his own house. Look you now—men have made worse friends than myself, and I love Cato, who is much too obstinate a man to be persuaded. We must get that Helene out of Cato's hands, if we want to keep Cato from being mobbed. Once or twice already they have nearly killed him because he did something stupid—once it was closing the brothels and once it was stopping payment of illegal bills on the treasury. So if you want my friendship, go you to Pompey and ask him to overrule Cato. You will either have to flatter him or buy him. Better both! For twenty gladiators of a new breed he would give you almost anything you ask. Cato will yield; he will have to. That will save his skin, which is what I want, and it may also force him into Pompey's camp, which would be good politics. But never mind politics. Get Helene released and you'll find my friendship worth more to you than Pompey's or any other man's in Rome."

But Tros had made his mind up, as the angle of his jaw betrayed to Orwic, who had learned to recognize the symptoms. Orwic strode to the door and opened it as Tros, with a jerk of his head, beckoned Zeuxis. The Greek, too, recognized finality.

"Zeus sneezes and the earth quakes!" he remarked, then took his leave of Nepos, winking and making suggestive movements with his hand when he was sure Tros could not see what he was doing. Nepos' face as he answered Tros' salute was an enigma.

IT WAS dark when they emerged out of the maze of lanes into a street. Torches were already breaking up the gloom where gallants swaggered to some rendezvous amid a swarm of their retainers. The city's voice had altered from the day din to the night roar; it suggested carnival, although there was no merrymaking in the streets; whoever had no bodyguard slunk swiftly through the shadows. Bellowing voices on the stone blocks under yellow lamps announced attractions within walls; the miserable eating-houses and the wine-shops did a thronging trade; but the streets were a danger-zone, dagger-infested, along which the prosperous strode in the midst of armed slaves and whoever else ventured went swiftly from shelter to shelter. Dawn never broke but saw the slaves of the *municipium* pick up dead bodies in the street.

"To your house," Tros commanded, as if giving orders from his own poop, and Zeuxis led the way, his five slaves, fussily important, doing their utmost to make the party look too dangerous to interfere with.

But Zeuxis was in no mood to dispute the right of way with any Roman gallant and his gladiators. At the sight of any group of men approaching he turned instantly down side-streets, preferring to risk a scuffle with the unattached ruffians who infested Rome and made a living by taking one side or the other in the riots that the politicians staged whenever a court decision or a ruling of the senate upset calculations. Such men seldom attacked any one unless paid to do it, whereas the gladiators who attended gallants on their way to dissolute amusement flattered their owners' vanity by bullying any group they met less numerous or pugnacious than their own.

So they were a long time reaching the bridge that crossed the Tiber, and had splashed into many a pool of filth besides unconsciously assuming the rather furtive air that strategy of that sort imposes on pedestrians. The five slaves altogether lost their arrogance, and in the glare of the lanterns at the guardhouse at the bridge-foot, where the stinking, empty fish-boxes were piled and the boatmen slept like corpses on the long ramp leading to the quay, they made no deep impression on the guards of the *municipium*.

"Halt there! Stand aside and wait!"

A gruff ex-legionary, leaning on a spear and leering with the easy insolence acquired in six campaigns, made a gesture that brought six more spearmen into line behind him, barring the narrow approach to the bridge. Over beyond the river there was torchlight, and there came a trumpet call, answered by shouts from the guards who were stationed at intervals along the parapet in pitch-black darkness. Lights on the bridge were forbidden.

Then another trumpet call, and presently a stream of torchlight flowed on to the bridge, its glare reflected in the water.

"Who comes? Pompey!" said the spearman, grinning into Tros' face. "Better get out of the way, my friend!"

His insolence was tempered by familiarity. He seemed to recognize in Tros an old campaigner like himself and, though Tros stood still, he made no effort to enforce the order, merely moving his head sidewise, curiously, to observe him with a better slant of light. The wooden bridge began to thunder to the tramp of men all breaking step.

"Let us stand back in the shadow!" Zeuxis whispered and set the example, followed by his slaves, but Tros remained facing the spearman and Orwic, arms folded, stood with him.

"Are you one of Pompey's veterans by any chance?" the spearman asked. "Take my advice, friend. This is a poor place and a poor time to approach him."

"He expects me," Tros answered and the spearman stared at him with new appreciation.

"You are either over-bold or more important than you look with that small following," he said. "We will see. We will see. I have seen strange happenings in my day."

Tros turned to Orwic and spoke quietly in Gaulish:

"It may be I was wrong concerning Cæsar. Possibly the gods have brought about this meeting. When the lictors order us to stand aside, keep place abreast of me."

A horse's head—a phantom in the torchlight—tossed above the lictors' fasces. Dimly, behind them, more horses appeared, and streams of men on foot, like shadows, with the torchlight shining here and there on armor or an ornament; but there was silence except for the groaning of the bridge's timbers and the echoing tramp of feet. There was a sense of mystery—of portent.

Suddenly the man in front of Tros threw up his spear and swung the men behind him into line, facing the roadway. They stood rigidly, like statues, as the lictors, two lines of four in single file, advanced with all the dignity attainable by human symbols of authority in motion. Stately, measured, neither slow nor fast but like the passing of the hours into eternity, they strode toward Tros, and he was no such fool as to attempt to let the two files pass on either hand. Though Rome was rotten at the core, that very fact increased insistence on respect for the tokens of her magistracy. To have dared to stand ground would have meant, more likely than an interview with Pompey, a cudgeling and then a ducking in the Tiber.

"Pompeius Magnus, Hail!"

Tros voice was like a captain's on his poop—resounding, sudden, vibrant with assurance. There was something of a gong note in it.

"I am Tros of Samothrace!"

"Halt!" said a bored voice and a dozen men repeated the command There was a rush of footmen to surround the leader's horse, then silence so tense that the swirling of the river past the bridge-piles struck on the ear like music.

TORCHES moved, swaying confusedly. Pompey, his cloak thrown back so that torchlight gleamed on the gold inlay of his breastplate, leaned forward on his horse, shielding his eyes with his right hand

"Who did the man say he is?"

"I am Tros of Samothrace."

"I believe I remember him. Let him approach."

Two lictors lined up, one on either side of Tros; two more opposed themselves to Orwic and prevented him from following. Tros was marched to about half a spear's length from Pompey's stirrup, where the lictors signed to him to stand still and a dozen faces peered at him.

"Is this an omen, Tros?" asked Pompey in a pleasant, cultured voice suggestive of half humorous contempt for his surroundings. "I remember you. I gave your father leave to use all Roman ports. I trust he has not misused that privilege."

"He is dead," said Tros. "I have word for your private ear."

"All Rome has that!" said Pompey. "I am pestered with communications. However, I will hear you. What is it?"

"Secret as well as urgent. Name place and hour and let me speak with you alone," Tros answered. "I seek nothing for myself."

"Rare individual! *Comites,*" said Pompey, laughing in the patronizing way of men who have been flattered until all comment becomes condescension, "here is a man who has sufficient. He asks nothing! Envy him! So many of us have too much!"

He stared at Tros, signing to some of the slaves to move the torches so that he could better read his face. His own was pouched under the eyes but rather handsome in a florid, heavy, thick-set way. His eyes glittered. The lips curled proudly, and he sat

his horse easily, gracefully, with rather portly dignity. He looked as if success had softened him without his being yet aware of it, but there were no signs of debauch.

"You may follow," he said, "and I will hear you when I have time."

But Tros had cooled his heels too often in the ante-rooms of Alexandria, where Ptolemy's eunuchs pocketed the fees of applicants, kept them waiting and dismissed them without audience, to be pigeon-holed as easily as that. His sureness that the gods were all around him, made him no cringing supplicant.

"You may listen or not, as you please, Pompeius Magnus. I have crossed two seas to speak with you. Name me an hour and a place, or I will find another who will listen."

Pompey legged his horse to hide astonishment. In all Rome there was only Cato who had dared to affront him since Crassus went away. A handsome youngster strode into the torchlight and stood swaggering in front of Tros.

"Do you know to whom you speak?" he demanded.

"Peace, Flavius! Stand aside!" said Pompey, reining his horse toward Tros again. "This may prove interesting. Tros, do you know where the temple of Vesta stands? Approach me there, after the morning ceremony. Forward!"

The two lictors hustled Tros aside. The bridge began to tremble as the march resumed and Pompey passed on into darkness, torchlight gleaming on the shield and helmet carried for him by a slave in close attendance.

"You are mad!" remarked Zeuxis, striding gallantly enough out of the shadow when the last of the long cortege had streamed by and a roar in the narrow city streets announced that Pompey, recognized already, was receiving an ovation. "If you go to the temple of Vesta Pompey will offer you employment, for the sake of obtaining your Northmen and Britons, about whom Nepos certainly will tell him before midnight. And if you refuse, he will seize your men for the arena. He will throw you into prison if you make the least fuss; he will simply say you are the enemy of Rome. You are as mad as Cato himself! You should have won his favor while you had the opportunity."

"You will do well if you earn mine!" Tros retorted, visibly annoyed. "Lead on."

Zeuxis fell into stride beside him but there was no more talk until they came to Zeuxis' house. Relationship of host and guest was obviously superficial now. Neither man trusted the other, and even Orwic, who could understand no word of Greek or Latin, realized that Zeuxis' house had turned into a place of danger rather than a refuge.

CHAPTER VI

VIRGO VESTALIS MAXIMA

TROS wished now he had come to Rome without his men—even without Orwic. He would have been safer without them. He could easily have hired two dozen Romans to act as bodyguard; he might even have bought gladiators; there were second-hand ones, maimed, that could be bought cheap. But all those possibilities had occurred to him before he left his ship, outside Tarentum Harbor, and his real reason for bringing both Northmen and Britons remained as important as ever; they were hostages.

However much he trusted his lieutenant, Sigurdsen, he knew he could trust him better not to sail away and turn to piracy so long as eight of his nearest relatives and a dozen other countrymen were ashore and counting on him to keep tryst. The Britons on the ship were not particularly loyal to their prince and might not hesitate to leave him languishing on foreign soil, since the majority had been enslaved as rebels, but the Northmen were as loyal to one another as even Tros himself could be to any man who served him honestly.

But that consideration made it all the more essential to save the men he had with him. If they should lose their lives in a fair fight, that might strengthen the bond between him and their relatives on board the ship, it being Northman aspiration to die fighting; but to lose them like a dunderheaded yokel choused out of his wares would be an insult and a breach of trust for which no Northman would forgive him any more than he, Tros, could forgive himself.

He could see through Zeuxis' subtlety. He more than half suspected that the Greek had all along known quite well that the prætor's men were nowhere near his house, and that he staged that panic, in order to introduce Nepos, who, he probably felt

sure, would try to get them for the school of gladiators; when, since Tros had heard the conversation, Zeuxis would be able to blame Nepos and avoid the charge of treachery toward a guest. Then, Tros' men being seized on any pretext, it would be a typical Greek trick to ask for pearls with which to purchase their release. And no bag of pearls would be deep enough. He saw through Zeuxis.

That being so, he surprized him. He preferred, if destiny intended he should lose his men, to do the thing himself, and blame himself, rather than enrich a treacherous acquaintance—and the more so when suspicion was corroborated by the Northmen after he reached Zeuxis' house.

He went straight to the Northmen's quarters. They were lodged in a barn between the cow-byre and the long, low, crowded sheds in which the Greek's slaves lived; and they were all asleep. When he aroused them they reported there had been no difficulties such as Zeuxis' slave had spoken of; they had not feared for Tros; they hardly knew he was away; some slave-women who knew Gaulish had made love to them and tried to persuade them to get drunk, but they had kept their promise and behaved themselves, suspecting trickery; besides, they had not known when Tros might need their services, so they had slept whenever visitors would let them. Between times they had mended footgear, persuading the Britons to do the same thing, to keep them out of mischief.

There was nothing to be done with the weapons or baggage but to leave them all in Zeuxis' charge. Tros did not dare to enter Rome with armed men at his back. Not even Pompey would have let his followers wear more than daggers openly, when they were once inside the city walls, unless the senate should expressly grant permission—not that Pompey cared a copper *as** for what the senate thought, but to have done so would have been tantamount to a declaration that he had assumed the sole dictatorship — which would have brought Cæsar hurrying from Gaul to wrest it from him.

So Tros told the Northmen to hide daggers in their tunics and make bundles of their other weapons to be left wherever Zeuxis cared to stow them. He disarmed the Britons altogether, since he could not depend on them to keep their heads in an emergency. Then, telling each man to equip himself with a flask and haversack, he bribed Zeuxis' steward heavily to serve out rations for a day or two. Experience had taught him that the Northmen's zeal depended on their stomachs much more than was the case with men from southern lands. Well fed, he would have dared to lead them against twice their tale of Roman legionaries; hungry, they would run away from ghosts.

Then he went to his room and dressed himself in his gorgeous oriental cloak and Grecian tunic, presently joining Zeuxis at the supper-table, where they were waited on by girls—descendants of the decadents who ruined Greece. It was the steward, whispering, who broke the news to Zeuxis that Tros' men were ready for a night-march.

"You desert me?" Zeuxis asked, with viperish resentment in his voice. But he was not so startled that he did not gesture to a slave-girl to pay Tros more intimate attention. "Surely you will sleep here? You can leave at dawn and be at the shrine of Vesta before Pompey reaches it."

"If I should wait, I might have more to beg of Pompey than I care to crave from any man," Tros answered. "Guard my baggage, Zeuxis, and remember—I have promised you nine pearls on a condition. If I fail, or if you fail me, though I had to throw a thousand pearls into the Tiber I would take care you should get none! I perceive your friendship is a purchasable merchandize. I bid high, and I paid you half down when we struck the bargain."

ZEUXIS' lustrously immoral eyes were looking at Tros' cloak. As plainly as if speech had said it, he was wondering where so great a weight of pearls was hidden, and Tros knew now his very life was hung in jeopardy; the lust that jewels have the power to arouse in some men, and some women, burned behind the Greek's eyes and the smile that stole over his face was like a mask deliberately chosen—thoughtfully adjusted—changed a time or two until he thought it fitted.

"Drink, noble guest!" he said, and signed to a Syrian slave to fill the cups. "This night has gone to both our heads. We talk like madmen rather than two sons of Hellas. Samothrace is stepson to Eleusis—drink!

*The smallest coin in circulation.

I pledge you brotherhood. May wise Athene's owls bear midnight wisdom to you. Drink!"

But Tros set down the silver cup untasted. Though he doubted that his host would poison him, he knew the Syrian slaves' infernal skill and read the greed in Zeuxis' eyes.

"Pallas Athene, judge then! I will drink with you again, friend Zeuxis, when I have accomplished my purpose. Though the goddess deserted Hellas, may her wisdom govern us! And now your drooping eyelids welcome sleep, so I will act the good guest and not stand in Morpheus' way. Sleep soundly, and may all Olympus bless you for your hospitality."

He took his leave magnificently, as if Zeuxis were a king, bestowing largess on the servants and avoiding any conversation that could give the Greek a hint of his intentions. He refused the offer of a guide, well knowing such a man would merely be a spy for Zeuxis; and he laughed as he strode toward Rome at the head of his men, for a slave went by on horseback, full pelt; and although he did not recognize the man, he was as sure as that the moon was rising on his right hand, that the Greek had sent a messenger to Pompey, or else Nepos, which amounted to the same thing. Pompey would learn of the pearls before dawn or, if not Pompey, one of Pompey's personal lieutenants, which might be much more dangerous.

He had one advantage. Wind and sea observe no hour-glass; he who has stood watch, and reefed, and gone aloft in midnight gales has lost the greater part of that inertia that dulls the wits of superstitious men in darkness. Tros could take advantage of the night and steal a march on treachery; and he thought he could count on his men to obey him though the shadows seemed to hint at unseen horror—though the Via Appia was lined with tombs and gloomy cypresses all haunted by the specters of the dead, and wind sighed through the trees like ghost-worlds whispering.

"I am afraid," said Orwic, striding beside Tros. "We Britons have an extra sense that warns us of things we can't see. My grandmother had the gift remarkably, and I inherit it. I wish I had a sword. This dagger isn't much use."

"Play the prince!" Tros answered gruffly. "Any fool can be afraid at night."

Himself, he only had one dread, one pertinent regret. He feared for Conops, who could hide himself in Ostia and watch for the arrival of the ship without the least risk of detection, if only Zeuxis had not known about it. He gritted his teeth as he condemned himself for not having sent Conops straight to Ostia before he ever entered Zeuxis' house. More to encourage himself than for Orwic's benefit, he broke out in explosive sentences:

"A man can't think of everything. The gods must do their part. We should be gods, not men, if we could foresee all. It would be impudence to take the full responsibility for what will happen. Are the gods dead—dumb—blind—ignorant? And shall a god not recognize emergency?"

"Suppose we pray," suggested Orwic.

"Like a lot of lousy beggars. Rot me any gods who listen to such whining! Shall the gods descend and smirch themselves amid our swinery, or shall we rise and breathe their wisdom?"

Orwic shuddered. Celt-like, it disturbed him to assume familiarity with unseen agencies. Drunk or sober, he could swear with any lover of swift action, taking half the names of Britain's gods in vain, but when it came to thinking of the gods as powers to be reckoned with he thrilled with reverence. He could, and he invariably did, scorn Druids in the abstract. In the presence of a Druid he was hushed and half obsequious. And when—as Tros invariably did—he felt himself within the orbit of the gods he was more fearful of them than encouraged—whereas Tros regarded gods as friends, who laughed at men's absurdities, despised their cowardice and took delight only in bravery, honesty, willingness, zeal.

"I think I hear the gods," said Orwic; for the trees were whispering. An owl swooped by on noiseless wings. The shadows moved in moonlight. "What if the gods are warning us to turn back? What can thirty of us do in Rome to hinder Cæsar? We have been having bad luck since the boat upset us in Tarentum Harbor. We were robbed in the inns on the road, and we were cheated by the stage-contractors—eaten by the bed-bugs—sickened by the bad food and the worse wine. Then Zeuxis' house, and treachery if ever I sensed it with every nerve under my skin! Cato—and what good did that do? He simply arrested that woman, which will turn her into our

malignant enemy! Now we march into Rome without weapons, to see Pompey, who—"

Tros silenced him with an oath.

"Take all my men then! Go to Ostia! Wait there! I will do better alone, without such croaking in my ears!"

"No," Orwic answered. "By the blood of Ludd of Lunden, I will not desert you. You are a man, Tros. I would rather die with you than run away and live. But I am not confident, nevertheless. I think this is a desperate affair."

"It is the gods' affair," Tros answered. "Nothing that the gods approve is desperate."

THE Northmen, meanwhile, swung along the road with the determined step of well-fed venturers whose faith was in their leader. Two circumstances gave them confidence—that Tros was wearing his embroidered cloak implied that he anticipated welcome from important personages; and that they had left their weapons in Zeuxis' barn convinced them trouble was unlikely. They were thrilled by the thought of exploring Rome—the fabulous city of which they had heard tales by the winter firelight in their northern homes; and they began to sing their marching song, the Britons taking courage of example, humming the tune with them. And when men sing on the march their leader grows aware of spiritual thrills not easy to explain, but comforting. That singing did more to restore Orwic's nerve than all Tros' argument, and Tros grew silent because pride in his men smothered lesser emotions.

By the great stone gate, the Porta Capena, the guards of the *municipium* stared sleepily, but they were no more than police. The city was defended on her frontiers—far-flung. Mistress of all Italy and half the world, Rome recognized no need to shut her gates; they stood wide, rusting on their hinges like the Gates of Janus at the Forum that were never closed unless the whole Republic was at peace, as had happened in no man's memory. Tros led in through the gate unchallenged and at that hour of the night there were no parties of young gallants and their gladiators to dispute the right of way. Rare guards, patrolling two by two, raised lanterns as they passed, by way of a salute. More rarely, a belated pair of citizens, escorting each other homeward from a rich man's table, hurried down a side-street to avoid them. Now and then a voice cried from a roof or from an upper window in praise of Pompey; coming in the wake of the ovation Pompey had received, Tros benefited by it; men supposed he was bringing in the rear-guard of Pompey's followers. Notoriously Pompey never entered Rome with any show of military power; it was like him to divide his following and bring the last lot in at midnight. There were even some who caught sight of the gold embroidery on Tros' cloak as he passed a lantern flickering before a rich man's house and mistook him for Pompey himself; but, since it was to no man's profit to inquire too closely into Pompey's doings in the night, those flurries of excitement died as suddenly as they were born.

But in the Forum there were guards who dared not sleep, since they protected jewelers and money-changers and the offices of bankers who bought and sold drafts on the ends of the earth. Nine tenths of Rome's own business was done by draft, men trading in each other's debts until the interwoven maze of liabilities became too complicated to unravel and the slave was lucky who could say who rightly owned him. Where the round shrine of the Flame of Vesta stood—Rome's stateliest, serenest building, in which the Vestal Virgins tended the undying fire and no unhallowed eye beheld the seven symbols hidden there, on which Rome's destiny depended—there were lictors and a lictor's guard.

Another lictor and his guard stood over by the Atrium, where the Vestals lived in splendid dignity; and yet another lictor stood watch by the Regia, headquarters of the one man in the world who had authority to choose and to appoint, and even to condemn to living burial, if they should break their vow of chastity, the six most sacred personages whom Rome the more revered the more her own unchastity increased.

By daylight, when the Forum roared under a roasting sun, there was no understanding Rome's invincibility. But in the night below the frowning shadow of great Jupiter's Etruscan fane that loomed over the Capitol, when only lanterns and the lonely guards disturbed the solitude, and moonlight shone on rows of statues of the men who had drenched Rome in blood, or had defended her against Epirus, against

Carthage, against Spartacus—of men who had returned from laying Rome's heel on the necks of Spain and Greece and Asia—of stern men who had made her laws and stalwarts who had broken them but never dreamed of Rome as less than their triumphant mother — understanding swept over a man, and even Tros stood still in admiration, hating while he wondered.

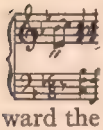
Orwic stood spellbound. The Northmen gazed and hardly breathed. Awe stirred imagination and they thought they saw the images of gods who governed Rome. To them the stillness was alive with awful entities.

A bell rang—one note, silver and serene, in harmony with moonlight and the marble. Silently, as if a grave gave up its dead, the shrouded figure of a woman came out of the Vestals' palace. Instantly, as if he stepped out of another world, a lictor took his place in front of her and led toward the shrine of Vesta. Slaves, more dignified and gentle looking than free women, followed. Every guard within the Forum precincts came to statuesque attention and Tros raised his right hand, bowing.

The procession passed and vanished into shadow in the porch of Vesta's shrine. Tros signaled to his men to form up; silently they lined the route between the palace and the shrine, ten paces back from it. Tros growled in Orwic's ear:

"I told you the gods guided us! I did not know the hour the Vestals changed the watch."

He stood alone in front of all his men, a fine, heroic figure with the leaner, lither looking Briton half a pace behind him. On his right, in line with Orwic, the grim, bearded giant who served as deputy lieutenant of the Northmen, in place of Sigurdsen who had to bring the ship to Ostia, stood breathing like a grampus.



THEN again, the one note on the silver bell. The lictor strode out of the shadow and the same procession wended its way back toward the palace, only that the Vestal Virgin this time was an older woman, statelier, who walked more heavily. Folds of her pallium, ample and studiedly hung, the arrangement of pallium over her head to resemble a hood, the repose of her shoulders and rhythm of movement united to make her resemble an image of womanly dignity conjured to life. Not the lictor himself, with his consciousness of centuries-old symbolism, more than echoed her expression of sublime, accepted and unquestionable honor. She was majesty itself—aloof, alone, so higher than the law that she looked neither to the right nor left, lest some one in the law's toils should be able to claim recognition and be set free. None, even on the way to execution, could behold a Vestal Virgin's face and be denied his liberty.

As she approached, Tros bent his right knee, raising his right hand, his head bowed. Orwic, uninstructed, copied him. The Northmen and the Britons knelt like shadows thrown by moonlight on the paving-stones, as Tros' voice broke the silence.

"*Virgo vestalis maxima!*"

Lover of all pageantry, and scornful of all life that was not drama, he omitted no vibration from his voice that might add to the scene's solemnity. It rang with reverence, but was a challenge, none the less. No less obsequious, more dignity-conceding summons to attention ever reached a Vestal Virgin's ears! It was the voice of strength adjuring strength—of purpose that evoked authority!

The Vestal faced him, pausing, and the lictor seemed in doubt exactly what to do; he lowered his fasces, the edge of the axe toward Tros, who made a gesture, raising both hands upward and then, standing upright, spoke exactly seven syllables in a language neither Orwic, nor the lictor, nor the Vestal's servants understood. But the Vestal drew aside the pallium that half-concealed her face—not speaking—pale and as severe as chastity, her middle-aged patrician features hard as marble in the moon's rays.

"In the Name I may not utter, audience!" demanded Tros.

She nodded, saying something to the lictor, and passed on. The lictor signed to Tros to follow at a decent distance and three women, hooded like the three Fates, arm-in-arm, lingered a little to make certain of the interval, their glances over-shoulder not suggesting any invitation to draw nearer. Tros signed to his men to follow. Not a sanctuary in the sense that criminals might find a refuge there, the portico before the Vestal's palace was a place where waiting, unarmed men were hardly likely to be challenged.

At the palace door he was kept waiting so interminably that his men grew restless.

Orwic whispered that another night was wasted. But the lictor came at last through a painted, carved door opening on silent hinges. The lictor beckoned. Orwic followed Tros.

They stepped on marble into a dim magnificence. An atrium adorned with columns and the statues of dead Vestals faded into gloom, so that the walls were hardly seen. Gold glinted on the cornices. There was a glimpse of marble stairs. Dark tapestries receded into shadow. There were two chairs, ebony and ivory, beneath a canopy between two pillars; and a rug was spread before the chairs that Pompey looted from the bedchamber of Mithridates' queen—a thing of gorgeous silences, in which the feet sank deep.

The lictor turned his back toward the door, his fasces raised. A bell, whose note was like the drip of water in a silver basin, rang once and a curtain moved. In dim light from the lanterns near the canopy two Vestals—she to whom Tros had spoken and another, twenty years her junior—each followed by her women, entered and the women rearranged the folds of their white pallia as they were seated.

"You may approach now," said the lictor.

The chief Vestal murmured, hardly opening her lips. Slave-women moved into shadow. The surrounding gloom became alive with eyes and figures almost motionless but it was possible to speak low-voiced and be unheard by any but the Vestals. Tros and Orwic marched up to the carpet, bowed with their right hands raised, and stood erect, waiting until the chief of the Vestals spoke.

"Your name?" she asked.

No arrogance detracted from her dignity. Her tone implied authority that none had challenged. Equally, no pride obscured her calm intelligence; she looked like one at peace within herself, because she understood and was assured of peace whatever happened. There was candor in her eyes that might turn cruel, but no weakness and not too much mercy. She was the patrician, consciously above the law and none the less steel-fettered by a higher law of duty.

"I am Tros of Samothrace."

"You have appealed in the unutterable Name. It is forbidden to seek favors for yourself in that Name. Nor am I initiated in the mysteries that you invoke, save in so far as I must recognize all branches of the Tree. For whom do you seek benevolence?"

Tros, taking Orwic's hand, presented him, the younger man not lacking dignity; his inborn aristocracy impelled him to behave as if the Vestal, of whose virtues he was ignorant, was no less than an empress. He conveyed the unmistakable suggestion that respect paid by himself was something that the very gods might envy—and the Vestal smiled.

"Orwic, a prince of Britain," Tros announced. "Regrettably he knows no Latin."

In his heart he laughed to think that Orwic knew no Latin. He could plead the Britons' cause more artfully than any Briton could, and run less risk of noosing his own neck.

"You seek benevolence for him? Is he accused of crime? Is he a fugitive from justice?"

THE Vestal's voice was tinged with iron now. She held her power to set aside the law—no cheap thing, nor a force to be invoked for ordinary reasons. Conscious of responsibility as well as privilege, doubtless, too, she understood the value of not interfering often; privileges strengthened by their rare use grow intolerable and are lopped off when they cease to be a nine day's wonder—which is something that the privileged too seldom bear in mind.

Virgo vestalis maxima, we plead for Britain! Cæsar plans invasion against people who have done no injury to Rome. The Roman law permits him to declare war and to make peace as he chooses, and the Roman senate is as powerless as I am to prevent him. We appeal to you, who are above the Roman law—"

"Cæsar is Pontifex Maximus!" the Vestal interrupted. "I will hear no calumnies."

But Tros knew that. He knew that Cæsar was the only man on earth who even nominally had authority to discipline the Vestals, and he guessed that was the key to Cæsar's plans. Though theoretically uncontaminated by political intrigue, the Vestals' influence was much the subtlest force in Rome; it easily might be the factor that should tip the scales in Cæsar's favor, more particularly since his influence depended on the plebes, whose favor he had always courted. Not even Marius nor Sulla at the height of the proscriptions when the garden of his private villa was a torture-yard and headless corpses strewed the paths, had

dared to refuse clemency to any one the Vestals indicated. It was not in the arena only that their thumbs turned upward could avert the very blood-lust of the crowd, though only there, when a man lay bleeding on the sand, was their interference open. It was never challenged because not abused; they never interfered to save a sentenced criminal. The crowd, that enjoyed butchery ten times as much because it took place in the presence of the Vestals, had an extra thrill whenever the six Virgins autocratically spared a victim. As far-sighted as he was ambitious, Cæsar had chosen the office of Pontifex Maximus as his first step toward making himself master of the whole republic, and there had been many an apparent stroke of luck since then that might have been explained as something far more calculable if the Vestals had not been past-mistresses of silence. Tros' last thought would be to try to turn them against Cæsar.

"I have come to assist Cæsar," he said, swallowing. Resentment against destiny half-choked him. "*Virgo beatissima*, my father was a prince of Samothrace. He foretold, with his last breath, when his spirit stood between two worlds and he could see into the future and the past, that I, his son, should turn away from enmity to Cæsar and befriend him. This I do, not gladly, but with good will, since I know no other way of saving Britain, and a friendship may not be forgotten for the sake of enmity. The Britons are my friends. So I will yield my enmity and be of use to Cæsar, though three times to his face I have repudiated him."

The Vestal nodded. Though aloofness limits men and women in the field of action, it enlarges their ability to see deep into character.

"How shall you save Britain and be Cæsar's friend?" she asked.

"*Virgo vestalis maxima*, can Rome survive, if Cæsar fails?" Tros answered. "He will meet with resistance in the Isle of Britain that will tax his strength and give the Gauls encouragement to rise behind him. What then? Are the patricians strong enough, or well enough united to keep Rome from anarchy, if Cæsar meets disaster? Can Pompey hold the factions that would fly at one another's throats if Cæsar's standards fell?"

"What if Cæsar should prevail in Britain?" asked the Vestal.

"*Virgo beatissima*, if all Rome's legions should invade that wooded isle, in five years they could not boast they had conquered it! There is a race of men who have defeated Cæsar once. There is a king who will oppose him while the last man breathes."

"Yet Mithridates fell. Is Gaul free?"

"Wait yet for the news from Crassus!" Tros retorted. "Roman arms are not invincible. Let only Crassus meet defeat, and Cæsar fail to conquer Britain—who then shall preserve Rome from the people's tribunes and the mobs? Pompey?. The patrician who holds his nose because the rabble's stench offends him? Pompey, who has twice let pass an opportunity to seize the reins? Pompey, who refuses the dictatorship because he knows his popularity would melt like butter in the sun? Pompey, whom the tribunes hate because he lords it over them, and keeps postponing the elections to upset their plans? Will tribunes, and the mobs they lead, serve Pompey—or rebel? And if the people's tribunes should successfully rebel, how long then—"

THE Vestal stopped him with a gesture, frowning. It was not compatible with dignity to lend ear to a stranger's views of what demagogues might do to Rome's most sacred institutions.

"For a stranger you are possessed by a strange interest for Rome," she said ironically.

"Rome is not my city, but I know her weakness and her strength," said Tros. "I would rather save Rome than see Britain ravished by the legions to whom Cæsar has been promising the plunder."

"Cæsar is not straw blown by the wind," she answered. "Nor is he a slave to be beckoned—"

Tros slipped a hand under his cloak.

"Nor a hireling to be bought," she added, sure she understood that gesture. "He is not like Cato, who prefers the lesser of two evils; Cæsar seizes on the greater evil as the keenest weapon. Nor does he resemble Cicero, whom gratitude or grudge can turn into purblind hypocrite. Cæsar is not Antonius, whom the mob's praise renders drunk. Nor is he a fool like Sulla, using power for revenge; he makes friends of his enemies if they will yield to him. There is no man in the world like Cæsar. Who shall tame his pride?"

"But one may foster it," said Tros, and put his hand under his cloak again. When he drew it forth there rested on his palm a heavy leather bag, not large but tightly filled and tied around the neck with gold wire.

"Why," he asked, "does Cæsar say he goes to Britain? What bid has he made to justify himself?"

The Vestal almost smiled.

"He has told all Rome that he will bring back pearls," she answered, "for a breastplate for the Venus Genetrix."

"These pearls," said Tros, "are plenty for that purpose—I am told they are superior to those that Pompey brought from Asia and put on exhibition in a temple, but did not give. They were entrusted to me by those who ponder over Britain's destiny. I am to use them as I see fit, in the cause of Britain. *Virgo beatissima*, I crave leave to deposit them in your charge, as a trust, for Cæsar's use, to be employed by him to make the breastplate for the goddess, to be known as his gift, if—and only if, he turns back from invading Britain!"

Not one moment did the Vestal hesitate.

"You ask what I may not refuse," she answered. "Whosoever obtains audience may leave whatever sacred things he pleases in my charge. But had I known what you intended you would not have been received! I am not Cæsar's monitor; nor have I any means of reaching him. If it were known in Rome that—"

She glanced sharply at the younger Vestal—then at the lictor over by the door—then swiftly into the shadows where her women stood, all eyes—but they were out of earshot.

"Were it known that I send messengers to Cæsar," she said, lowering her voice, "all Rome would say the Vestal Virgins are no longer higher than intrigue. And Cæsar's ways are too well known. No woman corresponds with Cæsar and remains above suspicion."

"*Virgo beatissima*, send me!" said Tros. "I have a ship—my own swift, splendid ship, well manned. By the unutterable Name, I swear that rather than betray you to the Romans I will taste death sooner than my destiny intends, and every man of mine shall taste it with me! I fulfill a friendship, than which no more godlike course is open to a man in this life. And I hold that he who trims his sails to catch the gods' wind, wrecks his soul if he breaks faith! If you think Cæsar can save Rome from anarchy, send me to save him from invading Britain, where he will only squander strength and wreak a havoc, while Rome dies, mad and masterless!"

"I can not protect you. I can not acknowledge you—except to Cæsar," said the Vestal.

"Let the gods protect me! Let the gods acknowledge me!" Tros answered. "If I will do my duty they will do theirs."

For a while the Vestal pondered that, chin resting on her hand, her elbow on the chair-arm.

"Cæsar's pride might be well satisfied," she said at last. "If he could make believe he had brought pearls from Britain for the Venus Genetrix—he might assert they are a tribute from the Britons—that would glut his craving for renown, at least a little while. He is a madman with a god's ability, a man's lust to appear generous, and a fool's ignorance of where to stop and when to turn. He might have been a god. He is a devil. But he can save Rome, being ruthless, and because, although he panders to the mob, he will deceive them, saving Rome's heart, seeming to supplant her head. Rome may live because of Cæsar and in spite of him."

"I am not Rome's advocate, but I will serve Rome for the sake of Britain," Tros exclaimed. He held the bag of pearls out in his right hand, kneeling. "*Virgo beatissima*, so send me now to Cæsar with your word to him."

THE Vestal took the bag of pearls into her lap and Tros stood up. Not even in a climax of emotion did it suit his nature to stay long on bent knee. Even reverence had limits.

The Vestal beckoned and a woman came; she whispered and the woman brought a golden bowl, engraved with figures of the Muses, that had once adorned a temple, before Sulla raped the shrines of Hellas. When the women had retired into the shadows she undid the golden thread and poured the pearls into the bowl, the other Vestal leaning to admire them, not exclaiming and not opening her lips—but her nostrils and her throat moved suddenly as if she caught her breath. Tros had not enlarged beyond the bounds of truth. Not even Rome that plundered Ephesus had seen such treasure

in one heap. Those pearls, under the lamplight, were like tears shed by a conquered people's gods.

"Draw nearer," said the Vestal, and again Tros knelt, that she might whisper in his ear. She said one word, then laid her finger on his lips.

"That word," she said, "will be sufficient proof to Cæsar that you come from me. He will believe your lips. But if you use it falsely, then I know of no death and of no curse that were not bliss as compared to what your destiny will hold! There are degrees of shame below the reach of thought. And there are depths of misery where worms that crawl in dunghills appear godlike in comparison to him who dies so deep! Not Tantalus, who told the secrets of the gods, knows suffering so dreadful, as shall he who violates that confidence!"

"I keep faith, not from fear," Tros answered, rising stubbornly. "What word shall I take to Cæsar?"

"Bid him look toward Rome! Bid him waste no energy, but keep his hand on Gaul, that when the hour strikes he may leave Gaul tranquil at his back."

Tros bowed. Her attitude appeared to signify the interview was over, but he had a task yet—and he needed for it greater daring than he had yet summoned from the storehouse of his faith in the invincibility of promises performed. He had assured Helene he would do her no harm if she trusted him; his own interpretation of that promise was a thousand times more generous than any she was likely to assume. Mistaken he had been in letting Zeuxis guide him to her house, and he had made a worse mistake confiding in her; but none of that was her fault. He would set right the results of that—and yet if he proposed to save her from the prætor's torturers he must summon enough brazen impudence to plead, before a woman whose authority depended on her chastity, for mercy for an alien whose insolent contempt of chastity was typical of what was steadily destroying Rome!

He made abrupt, curt work of it:

"If Cæsar is to save Rome, let him use all agencies," he said. "There is a woman in the clutches of the prætor's men, whom Cæsar had employed to ferret information. Helene, the daughter of Theseus of Alexandria—"

"That immodest rake—!"

"Is Cæsar an immaculate?"

"Cæsar is Pontifex Maximus. For Rome, and for the sake of institutions older than the city, I let myself see only Cæsar's virtue. For that woman I will not offend against the public decency by turning up my thumb!"

"*Virgo beatissima*, let Pompey carry that blame!" Tros retorted. "He has violated modesty so often that one more offense will hardly spoil his record! I am told he comes—"

"At dawn," she said, "to offer sacrifices for his wife's recovery."

"*Virgo vestalis maxima*, one word from you will be enough. If Cæsar's daughter—Pompey's wife—dies, who then shall keep Pompey from defying Cæsar? Will the mob not rend Rome unless Cæsar can prevail over the patrician factions, into whose hands Pompey will deliver Rome's fate? And shall Cæsar be allowed to fail because, forsooth, unquestioned chastity was timid and too careful of itself to whisper in behalf of Cæsar's spy?"

"You overstep your privilege," the Vestal answered frowning. "I will mention her to Pompey. I will keep these pearls in trust, for Cæsar's gift to Venus Genetrix, provided he draws back from Britain. But remember—I can not protect you or acknowledge you. Farewell."

She rose, inclining her head slightly id reply to Tros' salute, her dark eyes curiously scanning Orwic, whose expression suggesten a schoolboy's when a lesson-period was over.

"This way!" said the lictor loudly. "This way! More to the right!" And Tros and Orwic backed, until the silent door shut slowly in their faces and they turned, expecting to be greeted by the Northmen.

They were gone! The portico was empty. Silence, silver moonlight and a Forum peopled only by the statues and the watchful guards, who leaned against the closed shop-windows.

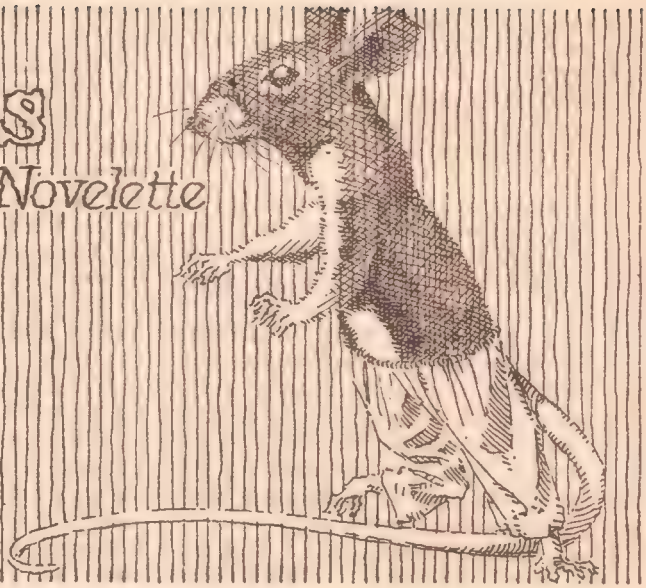
Silently a lictor, followed by a file of four men in the Vestals' livery, emerged out of the shadows and stood guard before the Vestals' door.

"Move on!" he ordered arrogantly. "This is no place for loiterers!"

TO BE CONTINUED

TLICK LATS

A Complete Novelette



by Charles Victor Fisher

Author of "Cash Jack," "Frog," etc.

HERE it was—slow music for "Silky" Mandell, chief radioman of the U.S.S. *Rapaho*. The captain's orderly had just brought the message to the radio office. It was to be sent to Cavite in the Philippines. Across the top in red ink was written the word "Rush."

"My death warrant," said Silky with a discouraged grin on his thin, dark face and a shrug of his slim but well-squared shoulders.

"And no liberty for any of us in Shanghai," added Jimmy Benton, the operator on watch.

Silky's other two subordinates—Dickson, sitting on the threshold of the doorway, and Mare, leaning against the switchboard—said nothing, but on their faces, too, were worried looks.

They had no way of sending that message. The radio motor-generator which was down on the berth deck had not been functioning for three days, since leaving Manila. The motor would not start, hence the 250-volt, 500-cycle generator, geared on the same shaft with the motor, would not deliver its alternating current with which to send out dots and dashes into the ether.

Silky had not reported the balky motor for the reason that he believed in letting bad enough alone. One time before, when he had gone to the captain and reported trouble with his apparatus, the captain had put it to him in just this way:

"Very well, Mandell. Fix it. And bear this in mind. The next time something goes wrong in your department, you go back on first-class radioman's pay and also shift from that cap and brass buttons back to the flat hat and pea-coat. I'm tired of listening to your troubles!"

"We've got an old obsolete outfit, sir," Silky had sought to palliate.

"To blazes with that! You're a chief radioman. If you can't keep things running smoothly, I'll put some one in your place who can."

Which was why Silky hadn't reported his balky motor. He and his three radioites had gone to it, had sweated and swore and hoped against hope. They had tested every circuit connected with that motor-generator, or so they thought. Every circuit tested "closed," O.K. They could locate no ground. A half dozen times they had taken the machine apart and reassembled it. But all their efforts had failed to banish the trouble. The motor would not start.

The real trouble was that there was no practical electrical skill in Silky's gang. They were radio operators of the highest order. They could work through roaring

tropical static with ease. Nothing went over their heads. And they had speed. No operator in the Asiatic fleet could "burn out" any one of that quartet; nor was there an operator in the fleet who could copy any one of that quartet if he chose to let his "fist" run. They were artists of dot and dash communication.

But that was all. They were not electricians. They knew radio-telegraphy and electricity as it is written in the technical books. Talk, theorize on these subjects they could with much of glibness and vague, technical phraseology; also they could write about them in written examinations when going up for promotion. On paper they knew all about radio-telegraphy and electricity. But when it came to "shooting" trouble and making repairs, they were lost. All they could do was goggle plaintively and helplessly at one another.

"Anybody close by?" Silky asked Benton.

"Don't hear any one," Benton answered, and then, with the auxiliary sending-set—a small, spark-coil affair which they used for short distance work—cut in and made the general call.

"Nothin' doin'," Benton said after signing off and listening in for a moment. "Couple of Japs in. Pretty far off."

Another hope gone. Had there been another ship in the vicinity, near enough for her operator to hear the *Rapaho's* spark-coil, Silky might have put the message through by relay. Twice he had hus gained himself reprieves since leaving Manila.

"I guess it's all off," said Silky. "I might as well go and tell the old man all about it, and let him go ahead and disrate me."

"Why not wait an hour?" spoke up Dickson. "It'll be dark then, and our spark-coil will carry further. We might raise some ship."

Silky held out the message.

"It's rush. If I don't report it sent and acknowledged in fifteen minutes, the old man'll be on my neck."

He looked down at his oil- and grease-smeared shirt and dungaree trousers.

"I'm a fine looking mess to go up and talk to the old man."

With that Silky stepped out the door, emerging on the bridge deck or top-side.

The *Rapaho* was one of the tramp steamers the government had taken over during the war and converted into a fighting ship. Forward she had a short high forecastle, abaft of which was a well-deck; then came the high bridge deck amidships, which was about half of the ship's length; aft of this was another well-deck, and then the poop.

Since the war she had been doing duty in Asiatic waters as gun-boat, supply ship, transport and cruiser.

Outside the radio office, which was on the after end of the bridge deck, Silky halted and looked woefully forward. He saw who he wanted to see and yet did not want to see. Pacing the official quarter-deck was the old boy who, within a very few minutes, in a very few words, would strip Silky of his cap, coat and brass buttons.

Incidentally, by those few words, Lieutenant Thorpe, the *Rapaho's* captain, would make it necessary for Silky's wife, in San Francisco, to go back to work as a stenographer. Even with Silky's pay as a chief, their going had not been easy. Their little fellow of two years had been sick a lot, and doctors and medicines had more than eaten up the narrow margin of surplus.

An unfortunate circumstance was that Silky was on decided terms of we-don't-speak with the chief of the *Rapaho's* electricians proper, "Ptomain" Wallace, chief of the dynamo-room force. Silky had tried, some time before, to talk one of Ptomain's men into changing his rate from electrician to radioman. When Ptomain heard of this, he and Silky had exchanged some hot words. Since then a silent state of war had existed between the two chiefs.

Ptomain had a gang of twelve expert electricians, all practical men, any one of whom, Silky knew, could have quickly shot his trouble for him; but he knew also that not one of Ptomain's gang would touch a finger to any part of the radio apparatus, because in so doing he would be helping his own chief's enemy, and would thus draw down the wrath of his own chief on his own head. Ptomain Wallace was a mean actor, once he got it in for a man.

As he stood there meditating his gloomy prospect, an idea, which might be called a loophole, came to Silky. He had just one friend in Ptomain's gang, or, rather, there was just one man in Ptomain's gang who would once in a while say "hello" to Silky. This man was "Baboon" Morley, an electrician second class. Silky's idea grew out of what he had heard early that afternoon; namely, that a battle of words had been waged in the dynamo room between

Ptomain and Baboon, the wind-up of which was a declaration by Ptomain in which he stated that he would not recommend Baboon for promotion to the rate of electrician first class this quarter.

With Baboon sour on Ptomain, Silky thought he saw a chance—a slim one, true, for there wasn't much time, but a chance just the same.

SILKY found Baboon back on the after well-deck at the port rail, glowering down at the rushing water.

Baboon Morley's two outstanding characteristics were his size and his unbeautifulness. He towered to six feet, was in the heavyweight class with pounds to spare, had enormous feet and hands and a face that would make a bulldog turn tail and go around the block; an inch and a quarter of slanting forehead over which hung thick, curly, dark hair, high, prominent cheek bones, a pug nose and a heavy, round jaw.

From the look of him he appeared afflicted with a perpetual grouch. But that was looks only. At the core Baboon was not a bad "flat-foot" at all. He had shown many a streak of generosity. Moreover, he was the one man in Ptomain's gang whom that chief could not bully.

Baboon had been an electrician long before coming in the navy. Since a boy of twelve he had worked at the trade, wiring houses, telephone switchboards, winding armatures, repairing trolly car motors. He knew all about electricity and electrical apparatus in a practical way. Theoretically, he knew nothing about these. For instance, he couldn't talk "juice" with any of Silky's gang because, never having read any books on the subject, he didn't understand their language. But Silky's gang did make Baboon laugh at times.

Knowing Baboon to be sensitive, Silky didn't address him by his nickname.

"Say, Morley, old-timer," the radio chief began in his most ingratiating tones, "would you help a fellow out of a hole?"

Baboon sent a stream of tobacco juice down into the sea, and then answered—

"I wouldn't kick 'im in any deeper."

"I hear Ptomain is throwing you down for first class," Silky tactfully interposed. "Fine bird he is."

"Is that why you're axin' me to he'p yuh out of a hole?"

"I'm asking you because I need help and you're the best electrician aboard," Silky evaded the point.

Baboon spat again impressively. He straightened up, his eyes on the vast sweep of gray sea over which darkness was now fast shutting down.

"I reckon you're talkin' about that motor-generator down on the berth deck," he opined correctly. "I noticed you and your da-de-da-da girls monkeyin' with it a lot the last coupla days. What'sa matter with it?"

"I wish I knew," Silky answered. "If I did I wouldn't be worried about my wife having to put the kid in a home and go out to work. It's the motor. Won't start. I've got a rush message to get off and no way of sending it. If I tell the old man, he'll bust me. I've tested and tested till I'm blue in the face. Ripped it apart—"

"I know. I seen yuh'se monkeyin' with it. But where do yuh start that motor from?"

"Why, up in the office. Push button. She works remote control."

"Then why don't yuh look for your trouble up there?"

"We did. Tested every circuit."

Baboon gave him a look of glowering pity, and then walked away forward with Silky at his heels. They mounted the bridge deck and entered the radio office. Baboon went over and stood behind the switchboard For a few minutes he ran his scowling eyes over the labyrinth of wires and connections, now and then plunging his huge paws into the maze to follow out wires that were concealed from view. Silky and his three radioites stood by, their eyes and mouths wide open with hope.

When Baboon grinned he appeared to be crying. And the face he turned on Silky just now certainly gave indication of a shower of tears.

"Yuh tested every circuit, eh?" he chortled hoarsely. "Here, gi' me your mitt."

He took Silky's fingers and guided them underneath a bundle of insulated wires. Instantly Silky felt the little joker, a connection in the motor armature circuit that had worked loose.

"Well I'll be ——!" Silky shouted exultantly. "Hey, fellows!"

The connection was easily made. Jimmy Benton pressed the remote-control button, and the balky motor-generator was balky no

longer. The spark-gap sang dots and dashes as Jimmy's fist danced up and down on the key. In two minutes he had raised Cavite and was sending the message. All hands laughed. Silky took off his cap and threw it down on deck.

"Thanks, Bab—I mean, Morley!" he shouted as Baboon went out.

THERE was a bit of a strut in Silky's gait as he walked forward on the quarter-deck to where the captain stood. Here Ptomain was growling unnecessary orders to two of his electricians who were hanging a portable string of lights. The bandsmen were assembling to render the evening concert. Many officers paced to and fro enjoying the cool breeze that swept down from the north. It was a happy ship's company for the word was—

"Shanghai tomorrow!"

Silky returned Ptomain's scowl by holding his nose shut as he passed him. Then he stepped up to the captain and rendered a very snappy salute.

"Message to Cavite sent and acknowledged, sir," he reported.

"Good!" said Lieutenant Thorpe, returning the salute. "That was snappy." He looked down at Silky's begrimed clothes. "Been working, Mandell?"

"On the motor-generator, yes, sir."

"Anything wrong with it?"

"Oh, no, sir," Silky lied. "Merely applying the old saying, sir — 'A stitch in time saves nine.' "

"That's good. That's fine."

With the old man in such an agreeable tone of mind, it struck Silky as being an opportune moment for the making of a request. And he had a request to make; one which, if granted, would accomplish the killing of two birds with one brick. He saw a way of doing away with all these trouble-shooting worries, permanently, and at the same time slipping one over on Ptomain Wallace.

"Why, Captain—" Silky squared away and looked his skipper in the eye—"in our radio department we're one man short of our complement, while the dynamo room has three men in excess. Could an electrician from the dynamo room be detailed to duty in my department, sir?"

Lieutenant Thorpe shook his head.

"No, Mandell, I think not. It wouldn't be quite regular. Your department doesn't rate an electrician. You rate four radiomen besides yourself.

"However," he added, noting Silky's look of disappointment, "if any electrician in the dynamo room is willing to change his rate to radioman, I'll gladly approve the change provided he passes the examination."

Silky saluted and withdrew. He went aft to a quiet, secluded corner to think things over. With Baboon and Ptomain at war, the solution of his problem looked simple enough. He had only to offer Baboon a much softer job than the one he held, and assure him of speedy promotion to first-class. How could any man refuse such a rosy proposition? Baboon would have to learn the dot and dash code, of course, and also read up on radio regulations. But with his, Silky's, coaching, this wouldn't take long. He would shoot Baboon through that examination with ease. Then he would have a King Dodo of an electrician in his gang, and all these breakdown woes and worries would be no more.

BABOON was on watch that evening in the dynamo room, which place, of course, was tabu to Silky. He didn't see his big prospective till noon of the next day, an hour after the *Rapaho* had anchored in the Yangtze River off Shanghai. Baboon was up at the poop-deck rail, watching and listening to the jabber of the many monkeyish coolies who plied about the big ship's stern in quest of garbage and passengers. Like about two hundred others, Baboon was in dress blue uniform, standing by to muster with the liberty party when the word was passed.

A slit-eyed, dried-up little Chinaman in a long robe of black silk which was mostly sleeves moved about from one man to another. This little Mongolian, Charlie Wang, was well known among the blue-jackets of the Asiatic fleet. He operated a house of many amusements over in the city. Invariably, when one of the American ships came up the river, Wang had something unique to stage for the fun of her gobs, and made all haste to get on board her before her first liberty party shoved off. Today he was offering a special attraction he called "tlick lats."

"Hey, you Melican sailo'man, me gottee new kinda fun," he went about decks telling

them. "You come Cholly Wang's house 'safte'noon. Me gottee lestant. Can do fill belly velly fine chow. You no likee beer, wine, whisky, can do smokum opum. No smokum opum, can do shooten claps, play poke, fantan. No gamble, gottee othe' fun, new fun, velly fine fun, tlick lats."

Wang buttonholed Silky as Silky was sidling up to Baboon.

"Hey, you chief sailo'man, you come Cholly Wang's house 'safte'noon. Gottee new kinda fun. Tlick lats."

Silky studied him a moment.

"Trick rats?"

"You savvey, you savvey!" Wang beamed on him. "Velly fine fun. Me gottee gleat lats. Can do sing song, dance, fight. You come looksee?"

"Sure, me come," Silky assured him, then turned and eased up beside Baboon.

With a world of confidence Silky put his proposition. Then he got one of the surprizes of his life.

"Shift over to radio!" Baboon went red-eyed. "Who, me? Learn the da-de-da-da code! Say, look at me! Yuh got the wrong guy!"

"No I haven't," Silky replied, holding his smile. "I want the best electrician on the ship. I've got the skipper's approval."

"The skipper's approval!" Baboon let fall a downpour of tobacco juice that missed the head of a coolie in a sampan below by an inch. "The skipper's approval to do what? Make a radio girl out o' me?"

There was a glare in his eyes that caused Silky to draw back a little.

"Provided you're willing," he added quickly.

"Oh." Baboon grinned hideously. "Providin' I'm willin', eh? Well, I ain't willin'."

"I'll see that you get first class this quarter," Silky held on. "You won't have any watches to stand. All night in the hay every night. Nothing to do but keep the set in order."

"Soft enough," Baboon agreed. "But I wouldn't be a radio girl."

"Why not?"

" 'Cause I ain't got pink skin an' little lady fingers."

"Oh say," Silky retorted, coloring slightly, "that pink skin stuff was started by some ham who got green-eyed because he didn't have brains enough to be a radioman."

"Think I ain't got brains enough?"

"If I did I wouldn't ask you to hook with my gang."

"Well, your axin' me ain't gonna do yuh no good. First place, I'd have to do a lot o' fool readin' an' studyin' an' learn the da-de-da-da code, an' that wouldn't leave me enough time for goin' ashore an' lickin' up the beer."

"Oh, that don't amount to a hootnanny, Morley! You can learn the code in a few days. Here—" Silky took from his pocket a small pamphlet containing radio regulations and data for operators. "Everything you need to know is in there. Read it through a couple of times."

Baboon looked at it. Again he twisted and contorted his face till he appeared on the verge of bursting forth in copious weeping; and Silky knew he was being laughed at. And now came the welcome word from the lusty lungs of a boastswain's mate up forward—

"Lay up on the quarter-deck, all the liberty party!"

Baboon turned and started forward.

"Silky," he flung back, "I wouldn't be a radio girl for a million dollars!"

CAME a hoarse chuckle at Silky's shoulder. He looked into the grinning face of Ptomain Wallace.

"Tryin' to cop one of my gang again, eh?"

"Cop your eye!" Silky was warm now. "You've got three men in excess and I'm a man short! And I'm going to fill that vacancy out of your gang!"

Ptomain was a money lender, one of those seven-for-five sharks. He always carried a huge roll. He drew a huge roll now.

"You are, eh?" He straightened out his thick wad of green and yellow bills. He wet his right thumb with his tongue, as one about to deal cards. "Tell you what I'll do. I'll lay you one thousand smacks at three to one that you can't fill that vacancy out of my gang within a week from this minute."

"That's an easy crack for you to make to me," Silky sneered. "You know I've got a wife and kid and never have any money for myself."

With that Silky went forward, descending the ladder to the after well-deck. There he stood at the rail looking down forward at the liberty party embarking in the string of boats. A shipmate came along and stood beside him, reading a letter.

"Say, Silky," said this fellow, "did you ever know 'Ducky' Jones?"

"Yes. I was with him on the east coast."

"Well, he's dead," said the other. "Here's a letter I just got from a fellow in the Mare Island hospital, saying Ducky died of delirium tremens."

"Ducky? The D.T.'s?"

"Yes. This fellow says he died a terrible death. Raved about snakes, monkeys, bears, rats—"

Silky heard no more. Probably the associative processes of not one man in ten thousand would have worked as his did in that moment.

Down in one of the boats at the gangway he saw the big, clumsy Baboon, licking his chops and grinning in anticipation of the much beer he was about to consume. In the same instant the voice of little Charlie Wang drew Silky's gaze to the left, and he saw Wang, a dozen yards away, take out of the silken folds of one of his big sleeves a rat the size of a half-grown rabbit, calmly hold it out in the palm of his hand and order it to sit up on its haunches, which the big rat did.

And out of those three perceptions—Baboon down in the boat, Wang and his trick rat, and the mental image left by the words of the shipmate beside him of old Ducky Jones dying in the throes of delirium tremens—Silky evolved an idea. It was the vaguest of far-fetched ideas. To one man in many thousands it might have looked feasible. Silky Mandell was that one man.

Turning, he again looked into the grinning face of Ptomain Wallace, who had followed him down from the poop, apparently to further tantalize the radio chief with his thousand-dollar roll which he now held out under Silky's nose.

"Three to one is a pretty fat offer, Mr. Radioman," Ptomain flouted. "You seem dead sure you can cop one of my men. Why not borrow some money and win some of this? It's yours up to one thousand beans."

Silky turned to the shipmate beside him.

"Got any surplus jack, Billy?"

The shipmate lent him twenty dollars.

"Now, Ptomain," said Silky, starting forward, "if you'll just wait here a half hour, I'll come back with some jack."

"The more the merrier," Ptomain shouted after him.

Silky went up on the bridge deck. He was just in time to catch Jimmy Benton making a wild dash out of the radio office door. Benton had less than a minute to make this liberty party, which was time enough. He stopped and split his roll fifty-fifty with his chief. Also he listened to some earnestly whispered words from his chief.

Silky entered the radio office, where he borrowed thirty dollars from Dickson and fifteen from Mare. Then he went out and proceeded to canvass the ship's company. He borrowed from seamen, firemen, petty officers and chief petty officers. He buttonholed every man he saw except members of Ptomain's gang. Fives, tens, twenties, they handed over, every one wondering, for Silky seldom borrowed money. When he returned to the radio office, Silky counted out just three hundred and forty dollars.

With the strut of a game cock he descended the after well-deck and stepped up to Ptomain.

"I'll just take you up for that whole thousand, Ptomain."

Ptomain didn't grin now. He was flabbergasted. With the look of a dying dog on his long, sallow face, he blinked and batted his greedy eyes at the thick wad of money Silky shook under his nose.

"Where the —— did you get all that?" he growled.

"Borrowed it. At even money, not seven for five," Silky flung back. "There's three hundred and forty dollars. That's a little better than one-third of your thousand. Now put up or squeal."

Ptomain didn't want to make that bet. Putting up a thousand dollars to win three hundred and forty didn't appeal to his business sense. It had not been easy, running that roll of his up to a thousand; it had involved the taking of long chances the night before down in the fire-room with a pair of loaded dice.

"Put up or squeal," Silky repeated. "It's your own proposition."

A crowd was gathering about them. Ptomain would have liked to squeal, but he couldn't without making himself look smaller than a rat.

They counted their money into the hand of a chief water tender.

"The proposition is, I'm to land one of his men in my gang within a week from now," Silky explained.

"All right," said the stakeholder. "I'll give the money to the paymaster to put in the safe."

SO FAR as getting any travel experience out of his naval service was concerned, Baboon Morley might as well have remained at home. On liberty he always anchored in the first place where the anchoring looked good, some place within two blocks of the boat landing, where there was an automatic piano and where large glasses of beer could be had. And that was as far as he got.

That afternoon Baboon pitched his doss in Wang's place because it was the first stop coming up from the boat landing and because there was everything to be had there—that is, everything Baboon wanted. Wang served meals and drinks, staged a show for the boys, let them gamble any way they wanted to or "smokum opum" if they cared to. Which was more than Baboon wanted. All he liked to do was drink beer, sing, and take off his jumper and shirt and display his mounds of muscles.

Wang's was a house of many small rooms and one large one. In this large room, which was a goodly-sized hall, was the bar. There were chairs and tables all about. Near one end was a pool table, canopied over with richly embroidered silken curtains suspended from the ceiling, so as to make it into a miniature stage. On this the trick rats would perform later, Wang's slant-eyed waiters informed the rapidly arriving gobs.

Baboon sat down at a table and ordered a bottle of beer. When the waiter brought it he ordered another. Having quaffed down these and two more and ordered the fifth, he took off his hat, neckerchief and jumper, piled them on the table, and then sat back, with his enormous arms folded, ready for anything.

The automatic piano commenced clattering a song he knew, and Baboon cut loose boisterously, about three half-tones off key. He could roar louder than any bear. His half hundred shipmates all applauded when he finished. Baboon swallowed his beer and shouted for another bottle.

The afternoon raced along. The place filled up. The jumble of voices, clinking glass and metallic piano tunes rose to a roar. But Baboon's almighty voice could be heard above it all. His voice grew louder and he felt finer with the guzzling of each bottle. One thing only marred his state of idiotic bliss, the fact that Ptomain was turning him down for promotion to first class this quarter. And watching Ptomain, who now sat across the room, Baboon decided that as soon as he had a few more bottles undershirt he would go over and hold confab with said chief.

But before that worked out—of all the surprizes!—Ptomain came over to Baboon's table and asked him to have a drink.

Knowing nothing of the bet between Ptomain and Silky, Baboon didn't know what to make of this.

"I tell you, Baboon—" Ptomain was all humbleness—"after thinkin' things over, I guess I was wrong in our argument. Let's bury the ax. Willin' to shake?"

"—— yes, chief!" Baboon grinned his famous cry-grin, and made Ptomain wince with his grip. "I ain't got no hard feelin'.

They drank her down. Then Ptomain stood up.

"About that first-class part of it Baboon," he said, "you get it this quarter."

With that Ptomain left the place. He was satisfied that he now had Silky blocked. Not a man in his gang would agree to change over to duty in the radio department. Moreover, he knew that Silky could do nothing by the overhead process; Skipper Thorpe would approve such a change only on request of the man making it.

NEARING evening, from beneath the silken canopy over the pool table came the weirdest of noises. It was supposed to be music, but it sounded ten times worse than a bag-pipe. The canopy was drawn slowly up to the ceiling, and there in the center of the pool table squatted Charlie Wang, blowing on a long flute-like instrument. He was literally buried in rats; they crawled all over him.

Suspended from the ceiling over Wang's head was a cluster of red, green, purple and blue lights, topped over with a reflector. But the unique feature was the way Wang had those rats dressed. The whole thirty or more of them had silk pajamas on, no two of which were alike in color.

With the rising of the curtain all the rats scampered down off Wang and formed in a mob before him.

It was novel, not wonderful. They were remarkably tame rats, but there was nothing great about the tricks they performed. As Wang swung off into another uncanny tune, they jumped and capered about on the pool table. Several reared up on their hind

legs and danced. Probably Wang had their front legs tied together. They played what might, with a stretch of imagination, be called Leap Frog, also Ring around Rosie.

This went on for several minutes. Then Wang stopped playing and the rodents knocked off their pranks.

"Me makee singsong now," Wang announced.

It might have been singing to a Chinaman's ears. To the *Rapaho's* gobs, the chorus of squeaks those rats emitted sounded more like the shriek of a locomotive. Worse. It was the most terrible noise mortal ear ever listened to. It lasted five long minutes. The instant Wang ceased playing they were silent.

"Now you looksee velly fine tlick," Wang then announced.

He commenced playing another lugubrious tune. One rat only responded—a huge, bull-headed fellow in pink pajamas, with long whiskers and eyes that reflected the light from above like two rubies. He crawled slowly forward, up over Wang's lap, then up to his shoulder, his ear, and finally perched on top of the Mongolian's head. There the big rat sat back on its haunches, its front paws folded devoutly.

Wang stopped playing and grinned.

"He play God makee him good lat," he explained.

Then came the finale, which was a free-for-all, rough-and-tumble scramble of the thirty-some rats after one piece of cheese.

Baboon clapped his hands and har-har-harred, as the silken canopy came down over the mix-up.

" 'Nother bottle o' beer, yeller belly," he shouted.

Jimmy Benton, at the next table, turned and in a sarcastic tone said—

"Aw, drink a man's drink, Baboon."

From a radio girl! Baboon stood up and glowered down at him. All he lacked of being a gorilla was the hair.

"Meanin' me?"

"I said Baboon," Benton answered unperturbed.

"I can drink men's drink with any da-de-da-da radio girl in the outfit any day!"

"You can, eh? Will you pay for all the both of us drink if you go under first?"

"Will you?"

"Sure."

Baboon took him up, not because he was proud of his drinking prowess, but because it was a contemptible radioman making the challenge. Benton shifted over to Baboon's table. They ordered whisky. When the drinks were brought Baboon tossed his down at a gulp. Then he held up four fingers to the Chinese waiter.

"Two more fer each of us, yeller belly."

Not being a whisky drinker, Baboon underwent a miraculous change when the fumes of those three drinks rose to his head. A feeling of increased vitality, vigor and power came over him. Somehow he felt much bigger, stronger. Looking down at the bands and mounds of muscles on his huge forearms, he was pleased.

"What a Titan, what a mighty colossus am I!" was his thought, though not in just those words.

And looking across the table at his opponent in this bout, Baboon felt pity for him.

"Say, yuh poor little runt, yuh better squawk out o' this. Y'ain't got no chance."

Benton laughed. Then to the Mongolian waiter, who at that moment brought four more glasses of liquor, said:

"Hey, pigtail, next time you come, bringee twelve drinks. Six drinks him, six drinks me. Savvey?"

The Chinaman grinned and nodded.

"All right, yuh doggone little monkey," quoth Baboon, "I'll make yuh so drunk yuh won't snap out of it fer a month."

"Hop to it, Baboon."

And hop to it they did, drink for drink.

Presently Silky Mandell came over and sat down at the table. In very serious and solemn tones he said to Benton:

"Jimmy, this is no way to have a good time. Think of what you're doing to yourself! You'll be seeing things tomorrow!"

Silky took a letter from his pocket.

"Listen to this. It's a letter Billy Conway got from a fellow in the Mare Island hospital."

He read them that portion of the letter that pertained to the death of his old shipmate, Ducky Jones.

"There. As fine a fellow as you'd want to know. Best shipmate I ever had. The only person in the world he ever harmed was himself. Rum killed him. He died the worst death a man could die. Went out with the delirium tremens. Listen!"

Silky read again:

"Poor old Ducky went out raving. Took six P.Ms. to hold him. He screamed about snakes, monkeys, bears, rats—"

Silky faced Baboon, whose unbeautiful grin had vanished.

"Morley, look at the frame and muscles you've got! Look at your powerful constitution! You're good for a hundred years!"

As he spoke, Silky's sending finger was making dots and dashes on Benton's knee under the table. Benton read—

"Ditch my chatter."

And ditch it Benton did.

"Aw, to —— with all that stuff, Chief!" he broke in. "'Cause one guy was ape enough to drink himself to the D.Ts. is no reason why two shipmates can't get together for a little friendly swig-fest!"

Silky stood up. For a few moments he looked down at them, shaking his head sadly. Then he walked across the room and sat down alone.

"DON'T mind that stuff," Benton leaned over and said to Baboon. "You know, Silky's got a way of takin' things serious."

Baboon nodded. But the grin on his face was a mirthless one.

"I sure wouldn't wanna git them delirious treenums."

Benton looked at him.

"Squawkin'?"

"Squawkin' your eye!"

The Chinaman brought the twelve glasses of liquor on a tray. There was careful method in the way he set the six glasses before each, but this went over Baboon's head. Benton picked his up, one right after another, as fast as the waiter set them down before him, and gulped them down. Baboon essayed to do likewise, but the third drink gagged him, and he was compelled to sit back with three full glasses still before him.

"Take your time," Benton grinned.

"Don't, hic, worry. I'll stay right, hic, wisha."

Baboon's vision was fogging up. He felt some slight giddiness or vertigo. Seemed there were more shipmates about him than before. And when Wang and his rats commenced the second show, somehow, Baboon saw twice as many rats. In fact he saw two Wangs, as well as two pool tables.

Baboon knew he was getting drunk. But he took heart when he looked at Benton, for Benton looked no less wobbly than he himself felt. He hadn't noted that the liquor Benton was drinking was slightly lighter in color than the stuff in his own glasses. Had he been shrewd enough to reach over and take one of Benton's glasses and smell of it, he would have smelt tea.

He drank down those three remaining glasses of whisky. Benton instantly shouted for twelve more.

It was all Baboon could do now to keep from falling out of his chair. He tried to concentrate on the rats, but these were all blurred into a mass of gray. Seemed the lights were dimming. He could no longer distinguish faces; all he could make out was blurred outline.

There were more drinks before him. Again Benton was drinking his down, one right on top of another. Baboon drank one of his. Then Benton began to sing. Baboon tried to join him, but all he could emit was—

"Hic—urk—woof."

Baboon was woefully sleepy. But he was game. He reached out one of his huge paws. But in trying to pick up one glass he knocked over two. Then he sprawled over the table, his face buried in his arms.

THAT was a terrible next morning for Baboon. He was the sickest man in the boat. His stomach was in nauseous and convulsive revolt and his head throbbed as with the pounding of a score of imps of inferno on the inner walls of his skull.

After checking in on the quarter-deck, he proceeded with all haste to the scuttle-butt, back in the poop. He was frightfully thirsty. His throat, mouth and lungs felt like sun-cracked leather.

The water in the scuttle-butt was not cold that morning. There had been trouble with the machinery in the ice plant. And nothing is more sickening to a sick stomach than warm water. A half dozen swallows, and Baboon staggered backward, his face a greenish yellow.

"Oh, mamma!"

He lunged out on the after well deck and made for the port rail.

For five minutes he vomited violently. About then it came to him that some one was standing beside him.

"Sick, Baboon?"

"No, yuh doggone fool, I'm jest exercisin' my belly muscles!"

"Here's something that'll fix you up."

It was almost against Baboon's religion.

Dickson, one of Silky's radio girls, offering him a bottle of "sody pop!" It was an insult.

"There's nothing better for a sick stomach than lemon," Dickson stated. "Ask any doctor. And it's cold. I copped a cake of ice out of the officer's ice-box early this morning. Feel—" holding the quart bottle against Baboon's hand. "Ain't it cold?"

Cold. That was the word. Baboon's mouth and throat were so hot and dry that it would have been a relief had some one chopped his head off. A cold drink of anything! The thought drove him wild. But alas, he couldn't take a bottle of "sody pop" from a radio girl out here in the open in full view of the ship's company!

But he did want to drink that quart of cold lemon soda-water.

"Tell yuh—"Baboon's voice was cracked and husky—"if yuh could slip it to me where nobody'll see said pass, I wouldn't mind swiggin' that."

"That's easy," whispered the obliging Dickson. "I'll take it down to the radio store-room. You come down there in a few minutes. I'll just leave the bottle there on Silky's chest. I can't wait because I have to make the next liberty."

"Good idear. Wouldn't look good, mind, fer me to guzzle sody-pop up here with everybody lookin'."

THE radio store-room was far aft and deep down in the ship. It was a four-by-seven cuddy, with shelves from the deck up to the overhead bulkhead on one side, on which were coils and spools of wire, tools, batteries, buzzers, head 'phones and other spare parts. On the other side was Silky's sea-chest.

Dickson had left the bottle of lemon soda on the chest and gone. The overhead electric light was on. Baboon pounced greedily upon that bottle. It was cold as ice. The stopper was off. Poking the neck of it into his mouth he tilted it and gurgled. Great Ninny Nanny, what a soothing balm for his cracked throat! His eyes felt as if they would pop out as the icy liquid gushed down.

Lowering the bottle to take a breath, he noted with rue that he had drunk two-thirds of the quart. He licked his thick lips. "Sody pop" certainly was great stuff. He wished he had a dozen quarts. He gulped down what was left.

Baboon felt much better now. The pounding pain was still in his head, also the sour sickness in his stomach; but for the moment the raging fire in his throat and mouth was quenched. He put the bottle down on deck and then sat there with his throbbing head in his hands.

Presently he saw something that just at that moment attracted him specially. It was a rolled up mattress on one of the lower shelves. Silky's, no doubt.

Baboon calculated. It was now about eleven o'clock in the morning. He didn't have to go on watch in the dynamo room till eight o'clock that evening. Nine solid hours with nothing to do. This was the best place in the ship to sleep off a hang-over. Up on deck there was always more or less noise, and always the likelihood of being broken out by Ptomain to do some extra job or other.

He took the mattress, spread it out on the chest and lay down.

WITH a queer, ticklish sensation somewhere down his right leg, Baboon woke up. He lay on his left side, left arm crooked under his head for a pillow, facing downward toward his feet. He might have followed his awakening with a yawn and a stretch; but what he saw, looking down along his right leg, froze every muscle of him.

On his right ankle, regarding him with beady little eyes, was a rat the size of a half-grown rabbit. It appeared to be seriously contemplating Baboon's wide-open mouth. At least so Baboon thought. But to save himself from doom Baboon could not close his mouth. Neither could he kick up that foot and thus throw the loathsome thing off. Coming out of such a death-like state, he hadn't had time to gather his wits. The effect of thus abruptly awakening face to face with a big vicious looking rat was to leave him paralyzed.

It crawled up his ankle, poking the point of its bewhiskered snout into the bottom of his trousers. He felt the gentle scratch of its tiny claws on his bare skin above the sock and also the cool, tickling pressure of its breath and whiskers and moist snout. Then it began to nibble. And that started Baboon's blood surging. With a breath that was almost a shriek, followed by "Oh,

mamma!" he kicked up with that foot, dislodging the rat and sending it squealing against the overhead bulkhead.

When it thudded to the deck Baboon dealt it a kick that reduced its squealing to silence. Then he took a ball-peen hammer from a shelf and rendered the silence permanent.

He stepped over to the door. This was no place for a man to sleep off a hang-over. No doubt there were more rats.

But the door was now locked! It took Baboon some minutes to make himself believe this. He stood looking at that steel door as one in a stupor.

He snapped out of his stupor and plunged into a state of red wrath. The butt of his wrath was Silky Mandell. He reasoned that Silky must have come along, noted that the door of his store-room was unlocked and, without looking within like the jackass he was, snapped the lock.

"A whole hatful o' brains!" he snarled. "Lock a man dyin' o' thirst in a four-by-seven rats' nest!"

His thirst was unbearable now. The throbbing pain in his head and the nauseous distress in his stomach had eased somewhat, but great heavens, what a hot and husky dryness in his throat! He couldn't swallow. He felt that he could drink bilge water, chew on a dish-rag, anything to get some moisture to his burning throat.

He searched for loose deck-plates, thinking there might be some water in the bilges below. No deck-plates were loose. Nor did cold-chisel and hammer avail him aught because those plates had been built into the ship so that they couldn't be pried up.

He paced his steel casket, three steps each way, his tormenting thirst growing worse and worse. He harked back to a story he had once read, of a shipwrecked sailor who had gone mad with thirst and finally ended his misery by jumping into the sea.

"And that's what'll happen to me," he groaned. "I'll go dippy!"

The worst of it was, Dickson, the only man on the ship who knew he was down here, had gone ashore and wouldn't return till tomorrow.

Suddenly, turning in his caged-lion glide, Baboon's eyes lighted on a buzzer sending-set—a practise outfit, comprising buzzer, battery and sending key, all mounted on a board. He stopped.

"Doggone!"

He could communicate with the radio office by radio. He could quickly stretch a miniature antenna of magnet wire back and forth across the room; to this he could connect one binding post of the buzzer; he could scrape a small spot on the deck clean of its coat of shellac, and on this weight down an end of wire whose other end connected with the other binding post on the buzzer—this for the ground connection. Then he would be all set to tell the operator on watch up in the radio room just what was what.

If he knew the code.

"Oh, mamma!" he groaned again. "If only I knew that da-de-da-da code!"

But he wasn't licked yet. He took the mattress off Silky's chest and tossed it over on a shelf. Then lifting the lid of the chest, he began clawing through Silky's clothes and belongings like a madman.

He found just what he wanted, a manual of radio-telegraphy. He tore through its pages. There it was, all printed out in dots and dashes, the continental code characters corresponding to the letters of the alphabet.

From one of the shelves he took a large spool of heavy, insulated magnet wire. Unreeling about a hundred feet of this he stretched it back and forth overhead for an antenna. Then with a cold-chisel he scraped a small patch of the deck clean for his ground connection. He hooked the buzzer-battery-and-key set in series with these.

Now he was all set. With the ship's antenna not more than a hundred yards away, there was nothing to it. What mattered the steel partitions and bulkheads between his and the ship's antenna? Steel, stone—nothing stops electro - magnetic waves in their flight through the ether. An antenna inclosed in steel will radiate just as efficiently as one in the open.

But the rest was not so easy for Baboon. He knew how those dot and dash characters should be made, having thousands of times heard the sing of a radio spark. It looked easy enough, the way those radio girls ripped it off. It was difficult with a hand that had never practised the stunt and that was big enough to choke a gorilla. But nothing is impossible to a man dying of thirst. Holding the book in his left hand so that he could consult the printed code, pick out the dot and dash character for each letter, Baboon sat there on the chest with

the buzzer set in his lap and labored through it. He sent:

Rapaho's operator. Man dying of thirst in your radio store-room.

He sent it twice and then began on the third lap. But before he was half way through it the store-room door opened, and there stood Silky Mandell with a large pitcher in his hands.

Baboon grabbed for the pitcher. Ice water! He gulped and gulped.

"Doggone!" Baboon gasped for breath.

"Yuh heard me, hey?"

Silky nodded.

"I thought you didn't know the radio code."

With one hand Baboon pointed to the book on the chest and with the other raised the pitcher to gulp some more ice water.

Silky grinned up at Baboon's emergency antenna. He hadn't counted on this.

"That sure is a concentrated aerial," he observed. Then looking at Baboon, "Boy, you know oodles about radio."

"Aw—" Baboon sat down on the chest, setting the empty pitcher down on deck. "Throwin' up temporary hook-ups like that ain't nothin'. I used to kind o' dicker with radio sets to home when I was a kid. I could always hear lots o' ships makin' da-de-da-da, but never knew what they was sayin'."

"But man, you can send! That was good stuff. You've got a good fist."

Baboon grinned.

"I guess you're kiddin' me, Chief. But it was sure fine o' you to come gallopin' with a pitcher o' water. I'da gone clean off my nut if I didn't get some water soon."

"No doubt. You see, I didn't know any one was down here. I'd let Dickson and Mare go ashore, and Benton is wobbly from yesterday, so I figured no one would want anything from the store-room. I came down here a while ago and snapped the lock."

"Jest what I thought," Baboon replied. He was somewhat groggy but very much alive now. "But say, do yuh know yuh got rats down in this——"

He stopped, staring down at the dead rat. One of Silky's shoes was planted squarely on that animal's carcass. But Silky betrayed no awareness of this.

"Rats? Not on this ship, Baboon."

"No!" Baboon grinned again. "Take a look at what you're steppin' on."

Silky's body swayed left and right as he looked down first one leg then the other. Then he looked at Morley.

"I'm stepping on the deck, old-timer."

Baboon eyed him for a full minute. This wasn't like Silky. He wasn't given to practical joking. In fact Silky was now eyeing him in the same way, with that quizzical look of a man who is aware of being made fun of.

"What's the joke, Chief?"

"That's what I want to know!"

Again Baboon pointed at the dead rat.

"Look what you're steppin' on!"

Silky took a step backward and stood looking down at the rat.

"What!"

"Doggone yuh, Chief!" Baboon stood up. "Wha'd'yuh wanna kid a man like that fer!"

"Kid ——! What are you raving about!"

Baboon bent over and looked hard at that dead rat. Then he straightened up. There was a wild look in his eyes, a look of dread, apprehension of something calamitous. He was unable to meet Silky's gaze.

"Tell me, Morley," said Silky in earnest, solicitous tones, "tell me what it is you see on the deck there."

Baboon went white, his eyes bulged, his jaw hung low. Looking like a gorilla at bay, he backed away to the outboard bulkhead. Silky followed him up. Baboon noted that he again stepped on the rat.

"What is it?"

Morley glared, his herculean chest rising and falling.

"A rat," he answered. "Look! There!"

Silky didn't look. Instead he fixed the big fellow with a steady gaze.

"Don't! Doggone yuh, Chief, don't look at a guy like that! What'sa matter!"

"Matter! There's no rat at all!"

"I see it, Chief!"

"Sure! It's in your brain!"

Baboon stepped over and dealt the rat a kick that sent it out through the open door into the passageway.

" 'Tain't in my brain now!"

"Listen, Morley—" Silky put his hands on Baboon's shoulders and stood looking up into his eyes— "you're a sick man. You're seeing things. Remember what I told you and Benton over in Wang's yesterday? You're in the first stage of delirium tremens now!"

And while they stood thus looking into each other's eyes, Jimmy Benton, out in the

passageway, picked up the rat and tossed it back into the store-room.

The instant Baboon saw that thing, lying there on deck in nearly the exact spot from where he had kicked it, he ceased to doubt.

"Oh, mamma!" he moaned. "I got them delirious treemuns! Let's get out o' here!"

SILKY led the way forward along the narrow passageway. When they came to the hatchway that led up to the well-deck, instead of ascending that stairway Silky held straight on forward. But Baboon held back.

"Where yuh goin', Chief?"

"Why—" Silky came back and took hold of his arm— "to the doctor's room. Come on, Morley. You need medical treatment."

No, sir! Baboon had a grip on the man-rope of that stairway; and it would have taken several Silkys to break that grip.

"Now, Chief, listen to reason," he pleaded earnestly. "I don't wanna go to no doctor."

"Don't you want to be cured?"

Baboon blinked over that a moment.

"How do they cure a guy with delirious treemuns?"

"Why, they have different ways. They give 'em pretty rough handling, I understand. They use whips, clubs, strait-jackets. But as I understand the D.Ts., your case is not serious. The fact that you saw a dead rat instead of a live one is a good sign."

"But that rat was alive at first. I killed 'im."

"Hm-m-m. Well, the fact that you killed him is still a good sign. And then you saw only one rat. That's good too. Some of those fellows see all kinds of things."

"Wha'd'yuh s'pose the doctor'll do to me?"

"Oh, send you to a hospital. Put you under observation."

"What horsepital?"

"I don't know, Morley."

"Y'do too! It's a crazy house yuh mean!"

Silky made no reply. He looked down at the deck.

"Chief, I don't wanna go to no horsepital."

"Morley, I'm a chief petty officer in this navy, and I can't let personal sentiment interfere with duty."

"Didn't I do yuh a favor the other day when I shot your motor trouble?"

"Yes. And I appreciate it. But—" Silky's dark eyes shot fire. "Hang it, Morley, on top of that you made me the laughing stock of the ship! You called me and my gang names, da-de-da-da girls and all that junk, and Ptomain standing right near taking it all in! And all on account of what you said I got roped into a bet with Ptomain. He laid me a thousand dollars to three hundred and forty that I couldn't land one of his gang in my department inside of a week. I knew he had me beat, of course, but I couldn't squawk. I borrowed the money and covered him. Now I stand to lose that three hundred and forty."

On hearing about that bet Baboon brightened up.

"Doggone! Yuh bet Ptomain— By gosh! Then that's why Ptomain was so nice to me over in Wang's yesterday!"

"No doubt. Well, come on, Morley, let's get up to the doctor's."

"Now, Chief, listen to reason!"

"Oh, be hanged with that stuff, Morley! You didn't care a rap how you handed me that radio girl stuff yesterday in front of all hands! No man can call me and my gang women and get away with it! You wouldn't be a radio girl for a million dollars, eh? All right. You don't have to! But what was the idea in broadcasting it to the ship's company?"

"Listen here, Chief!" Baboon shook Silky's hand from his elbow. He took hold of Silky's wrists. There was red in the big boy's eyes now. "There ain't no reason why you an' me can't hit this off fifty-fifty! You stand to lose three hundred and forty dollars if yuh flunk on gettin' a man out o' the dynamo room into your gang. That it? All right. I stand to get slated for a nut if yuh run me up to the doctor's. All right. You don't wanna lose your money and neither do I wanna go to no crazy house."

He paused a moment, letting go of Silky's wrists, and then went on:

"If the crack I made yesterday hurt your feelin's, I'm sorry. But I meant what I said about not bein' a radio girl fer a million dollars. I wouldn't."

"You don't have to, Morley."

"But I'd ruther be a radio girl than go to a crazy house."

"Oh-o-o!" Silky stroked his chin. "You mean, if I keep my bazzoo shut about that rat, you'll agree to change your rate and shift over to my gang?"

"Hope to spit in your starboard eye! I'll go up to the exec's office right now and

put in to change my rate to radioman. You said yesterday that yuh got the old man's approval."

"I have. Not only that. I can shoot you right through the examination. I can get you signed over tomorrow. You see, I've a drag with the radio officer, Ensign Buckner. He's an ex-gob. He understands."

Baboon grinned his famous grin. They shook hands.

NOT many minutes later, Silky mounted the bridge deck and entered the radio office.

"He's ours, Jimmy, he's ours!" he burst in on Benton.

A rustle of silk had followed the radio chief in.

"Hey, you chief sailo'man," spoke Charlie Wang, "I come get back my tlick lat you lend."

Silky turned and grinned.

"Him die, Charlie, him die."

"Velly good lat."

"Sure. How much cost, proper price?"

"Plopeh plice ten dollahs."

Silky turned to Benton.

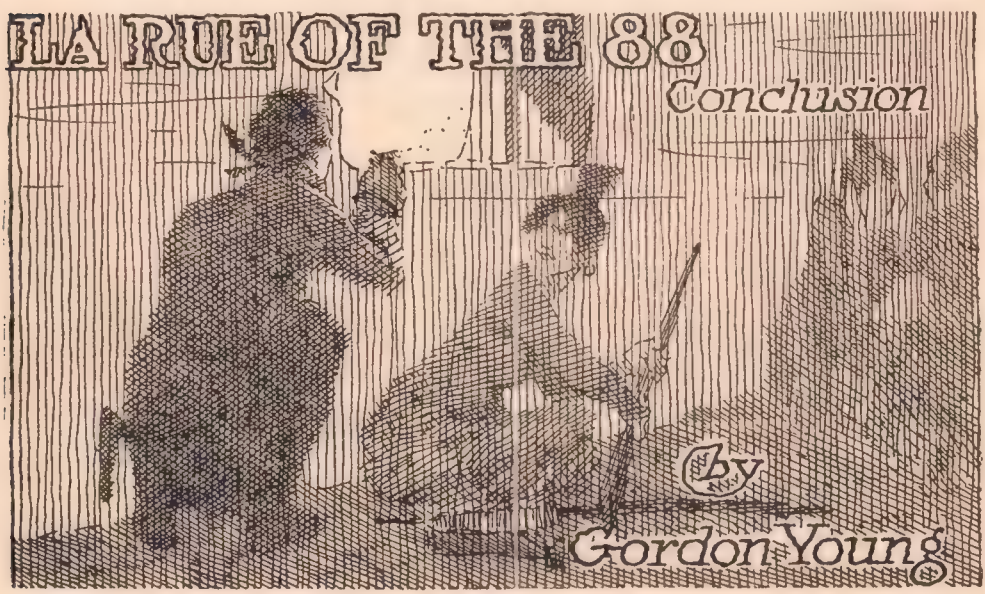
"Slip me ten till tomorrow, Jimmy, till I can get Baboon signed over, and can collect that bet."

Benton handed him the ten dollars.

"That's an awful price to pay for a rat," he said.

"I know," Silky replied. "But it's money well spent."

"Velly good lat, velly good lat," Wang repeated, grinning and bowing his way out.



Author of "Pearl-Hunger," "Days of '49," etc.

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form

BEFORE the railroad came to Perez, a little adobe village of the southwestern cattle country, old George La Rue bought a ranch sixty miles from town, which he called the Eighty-Eight. One day Monk Cunningham, the unscrupulous owner of the neighboring ranch called on the La Rues. Next day Mrs. La Rue left her husband and child and was never heard of again.

As young Larry La Rue, the son, grew up he became more and more worthless, and ran to worse and worse companions. His father stood drunkenness, lies, theft, even close association with Cunningham from his son; but when Larry ruined the innocent and beautiful daughter of old Hendryx, La Rue ordered his son from his door forever. Young Larry fled the country, and disappeared from sight.

Time passed. It was now twenty years from the time when La Rue first came to Perez. There was a railroad, and with it came numbers of people. Hotels grew up; stores, restaurants, dance halls. There were more ranchers than before. There was Jake Spencer, and the Hammarsmiths who hated each other. The Spencer outfit because things were

said about old Jake's wife and young Cliff Hammarsmith while the Hammarsmith outfit returned the compliment. There were also two youngsters, Tom Walker and Blade Jones, who had a small ranch. They used Cunningham's water, and were universally hated by him and all his political friends in town. Of these politicians the chief was Jim Barley, a cripple who owned a dance hall and told the Mexican townspeople how to vote.

One day old George was reading a letter in Barley's café when a stranger stepped in.

La Rue looked up, startled, and fumbled for his gun. The stranger fired and killed La Rue.

"Anything to say, gentlemen?" he asked. "Say it now. Boyd's my name, an' I'm ridin' outa here now. This here settles an ol' battle."

"You fought fair," they said and let him go. But they wondered who would get the ranch now. They had no idea where young La Rue was.

The letter in old George's hand was from his niece saying that she and her mother were on their way to visit him. Jim Barley was appointed administrator of the La Rue ranch.

A HORSEMAN rode into Perez and stopped at Pop Murdock's Santa Fé saloon. His face was bronzed and hard.

He looked at the reward signs on the wall, where, conspicuously, there stood a card which read:

WANTED
DEAD OR ALIVE
BUCK HARRISON

"Bourbon," he said to Pop.

Said Pop to himself:

"Here's one bad hombre. Young, but he's learned." Aloud he said—

"Who are you?"

"La Rue," said the man. "Laurence La Rue."

After some talk with Pop Murdock and a little affair with Slab Saunders, town bad man and foreman of the Eighty-Eight under Barley, over a card game, La Rue informed Slab that he was no longer foreman, and backed up his statement with a gun.

Later, in the I. X. L. saloon, he made friends with a young puncher by the name of Red Clark and a girl called Nora. Hendryx, turning from the piano recognized him as La Rue, and Jim Barley was called in to talk things over.

Barley claimed that old George La Rue had left a will cutting young Larry off, and offered to destroy the will and give him ten thousand dollars for a bill of sale for the ranch. La Rue refused and Barley threatened him, promising to talk the matter over with Slab Saunders and see Larry later.

AFTER in the I. X. L. saloon La Rue met old Jake Spencer. Spencer refused to believe this man to be La Rue, much to the surprize of honest Red Clark whom La Rue had hired as top hand for the Eighty-Eight. Later Barley saw La Rue and tried to bully him into signing a bill of sale to the ranch by pretending that he had found a will leaving the Eighty-Eight to old George's niece and sister who were now residing at the ranch. La Rue refused to believe the will story, and left Barley beaten and angry.

As he came from the interview the girl Nora looked strangely at him.

"I wonder if she knows that I'm Buck Harrison," he thought.

BUCK, Juan Hurtados a Mexican servant of his, and Red Clark rode out to the Eighty-Eight ranch. They heard the Negro cook refuse to give food to Mrs. Allen, old George La Rue's sister and her daughter, Jane. He discovered that Saunders was trying to starve the women out.

"It's all right," he told them, "Saunders is fired."

But they seemed unwilling to accept him as a friend. That night Saunders' men returned to the bunkhouse and Buck, listening outside, overheard them say that they were rustling cattle from the Eighty-Eight, and that they hoped to be able to scare La Rue off his own ranch.

Coolly he walked in and told them to get out. There was something about the man that frightened them into doing it.

"You can't have your blankets until you bring my cattle back," he said. "And you can't bring my cattle back without horses. Go into the corral and catch some."

But the horses were too wild to catch; and Windy Mills and Saunders' other men stayed out in the cold all night trying to catch horses. Buck and his two men sat in the bunkhouse with guns to prevent the men from returning.

Finally the expelled punchers lit a fire.

"Kick out that fire," shouted Buck. "D'ya think I want my corrals burnt up."

"It's cold," cried Windy.

"Run around. Jump up an' down. Keep warm thataway," said Buck.

Nothing more was shouted, but Buck could hear the men cursing as they scattered the fire with their boots.

NEXT morning after Buck had forced Saunders' men to tell him where they were keeping his cattle he gave them horses and let them go.

Buck, Red, Mrs. Allen and Jane went to the Spencer's ranch for the day, Buck riding, Red driving the buckboard with Mrs. Allen and Jane. Jake and Buck had a talk.

"I'm Buck Boyd," said Harrison, "an' old George La Rue stole a ranch from my pa in the old days on the border. I reckon I deserve some of the Eighty-Eight. That's why I'm here."

"Jack Boyd's son?" asked Jake. "Then I'm for ya'. Any one who knew Jack in the old border days would fight for him."

Later Jake told the women that La Rue of the Eighty-Eight was all right, and was working for them and not against them.

When they returned to the Eighty-Eight they found that the place had been ransacked, and that old Juan Hurtados had been killed. On the corpse was pinned the following letter:

Warnen. Git out the country. This here shows weuns means business. Wimmen an' all git out. Signed: You to you.—LA RUE

Buck wrote Spencer a letter asking for reinforcements and telling Jake that he had decided that he had no right to do the women out of the ranch.

When he had dispatched it a man rode up and told him that Saunders' men had killed one of his partners and wounded another, and that they were at Wild Horse valley.

Buck rode over with him, waiting outside the shack where Saunders' men were, until dawn. Then he stepped suddenly in the door and shot, both guns blazing. Only two were not killed.

Buck came back to find his father arrived at the Eighty-Eight. Boyd told him that there was a war on between Spencer and the Hammarsmiths. Every one was riding towards the Arrowhead to help Jake.

Red Clark, walking beside some bushes overheard Buck say to his father:

"Dad, as shore as my name's Buck Harrison I'm gonna get that Saunders."

Red did not know what to make of it. He, an honest man, working for an outlaw.

"Well," he said to his horse, "what d'you make of it, ya lanky piece a crow feed."

But the powerful black made no answer.

NEXT morning Buck received a letter from Nora, the girl at the I. X. L. saloon, telling him that he must come to town immediately as she had overheard Barley, Cunningham and another man talking about him and had some important news to impart.

Red rode with Buck to town, and told him that he knew him to be Harrison.

They went down to the I. X. L. saloon where they had a talk with a U. S. Marshal who had just arrived. The Marshal was after the real La Rue, and when he discovered that Buck was Jack Boyd's son he did not question him further. They found Nora, who said that Cunningham had the real La Rue at his ranch and had a bill of sale for the ranch. That they meant to kill Buck and get the women out of the country so that they would go unchallenged.

Buck decided to put an article in the Perez *Mercury* telling the truth about the whole matter—without disclosing his real identity. They entered the newspaper office and forced Adams, the editor, to set up an article which they dictated. He refused but finally did so at the point of a gun on condition that they give him a horse with which to escape from town. When the paper was printed they scattered it about the streets.

Saunders rode into town. He saw Buck. Both drew, but Buck shot first killing his man. They saw the Marshal.

"Where you goin'," asked Buck.

"Ridin' out ta Cunnin'ham's," said the Marshal.

"Reckon we'll ride out a piece with ya," answered Buck.

So they rode on.

Murdock and Nora rode over toward Jake Spencer's ranch. Soon Nora left Pop to go to the Eighty-Eight.

Murdock met Mrs. Spencer and Cliff Hammarsmith driving away together in a buckboard. He shot Cliff and drove Mrs. Spencer back home.

"Don't tell Jake," she pleaded, "I didn't mean to do it."

"A'right," said Murdock, "put on yore apron an' get Jake's supper. Yo're gonna be a good wife to him after this."

Buck, Red and the Marshal rode out toward Cunningham's. On the way they met Sheriff Aquillar.

"Howdy," said the Marshal. And they rode on leaving Aquillar to go on to town.

AS THEY approached Cunningham's they were met by yelping dogs that barked savagely, but circled and sidled at a distance from the horses. Though the dogs made a great noise, no one appeared until the horsemen were within a hundred yards of the house. Then a man of enormous girth showed himself in the doorway.

"Señor Cunn'ham," said the girlish Mexican boy.

Both Buck and Red looked all about, but there was no one else in sight. Buck had said:

"My hoss wears a brand as ain't known in this country, an' if anybody speaks up about you bein' on an Eighty-Eight hoss, jus' say you got 'im this mornin' out o' Hendryx's liver' stable—the which is shore truth!"

Cunningham with waddling steps came a few feet from the doorway and stood waiting. He was bare-headed and shaded his eyes with his palm, looking toward them.

"Darn queer," said Red. "Why, if anybody wanted they could jus' pot him. His size bein' what it is, nobody could miss!"

Buck did not say anything. They rode up to Cunningham and stopped; Red getting his horse into a position that did not show the branded side.

Cunningham had retained all the ugliness that had caused him years before to be given the name of Monk, but he had grown fat; long ago too fat to use a saddle. His big face was hairy rather than bearded, as if the kinky hairs would grow only so long and no longer. His brows were heavy, protruding, and the eye sockets were large, but the eyes small, sunken, close together. Though his height was not more than that of the average man, his body was enormous, giving him a malformed squat appearance.

"Howdy," said Cunningham in a deep voice.

"Howdy," said the Marshal, examining him critically.

"Was you wantin' somethin'?" asked Cunningham.

"Are you Cunningham?" asked the Marshal.

"That there is my name. Was you wantin' for to see me?"

At that moment Buck's wary eyes caught sight of a peeping face at an open window—a thin dark frightened face. The man saw that he was seen and ducked back.

"Yes," said the Marshal slowly, with a kind of weary composure. "I come out to have a word with you."

As he spoke he opened his coat and showed his badge.

Cunningham did not appear surprized or uneasy. He did turn his head and look a little uncertainly toward the house, then glanced at Red and Buck, and looking at the Marshal said—

"Well, light down an' come in."

As they were dismounting, Buck out of the corner of his mouth said to Red:

"I smell a suspicion. Somethin' it is wrong, somehow."

"Yeah," said Red. "Yore smeller is acc'rate."

"Me," Buck went on, bending down to adjust a spur strap, "I'll keep clost to him, so if anybody's hurt it'll be him. The skunk La Rue he's there in the house. Watch for him."

By much experimenting Red, who believed it wise to know all that was knowable about a horse one had selected for a partner, had found that the black was inclined to sidle off and stroll if the reins were left dangling, but that he would stand if a rope about his neck was thrown to the ground; so he tossed the rope down and walked toward the doorway where Cunningham stood by the Marshal.

Cunningham had just said in a husky whisper:

"I was 'spectin' you, but not quite so soon." Then lifting his voice—"Go right along in—" and he stood aside to let the Marshal pass.

It was a long room, low of ceiling, dim, very dim to eyes just entering from the bright sunlight.

The Marshal stepped inside, feeling for a cigar as he entered; close behind him came Red.

"After you, after you," said Buck, frankly distrustful and grinning at Cunningham.

"Why you know I sent in word!" said Cunningham with confidential huskiness, as if aggrieved.

"After you anyhow!" Buck told him, not understanding clearly what he meant.

Cunningham with waddling sway of body filled the doorway, entering—a rifle blazed through a window at the far end of the room and a shower of adobe dust dashed into Cunningham's face.

Red leaped aside, along the wall, with gun out, peering for a moment, waiting. The Marshal stopped, watchful, not at all excited. He pushed aside his coat and put his hand to his gun, but he did not draw. He, with the golden ægis of the United States upon his breast, had a proud reluctance to make gun-play, like an ordinary sheriff's deputy.

"Trap—huh!" Buck snarled, and with one hand he snatched Cunningham's own six-shooter from its holster and jammed it against Cunningham's side; and with the other hand drew his own gun and held it hip-high, muzzle on, as he peered.

"Me—he shot at *me!*" Cunningham had bellowed. "Git 'im—for ——'s sake—"

Red, having paused a moment expectantly, ran across the room, looking out, peering from the window. The Marshal quickly, but without excitement, went to the door on the far side of the room and looked out.

"In with you!" said Buck, prodding Cunningham, and half believing that it was at him the shot had been fired, but nevertheless unwilling to trust him.

Cunningham was terrified; his breath whistled asthmatically, and he could not run, but his body shook like shaken jelly as he struggled with waddling haste across the room as Buck distrustfully prodded him.

Red had climbed through the window. At that moment the Mexican boy appeared around the corner, running, looking backward. Red ran to the corner, and his yell caused Buck to wheel, ignoring Cunningham, and jump back to the door. There he stopped, watching.

The man who, knowing these men were about to enter the house, had climbed through a window and fired with the rifle had then run around the house; and naturally he had picked out the largest and most powerful horse with which to escape. Throwing off the loop of rope and gathering up the reins he had hit the saddle, and the black, climbed by a stranger, went into the air. At the first plunge the rifle dropped from the man's hand, and with both hands he gripped the horn. The black switched ends, humping himself, and the man went out of the saddle as if tossed from a springboard, then lay upon the ground as if dead.

Red and Buck ran to him, half lifting him. The fellow groaned.

"Jus' had some skin knocked off his face

an' some wind knocked outta him. Be awright in a minute," said Red.

The Marshal came over and looked down. He nodded and said quietly:

"That's the man."

"He shot at me!" Cunningham bellowed, coming up, trying to hurry and cursing furiously. "Shot at me—at *me!*"

"Yeah," said Buck. "I don't blame you for feelin' bad. Such pore shootin' on the part of a friend it is disheartenin'. Why do you reckon he done it?"

"Serves me right for bein' good-hearted!" said Cunningham. "This here is Larry La Rue. There's another feller come into the country claimin' to be La Rue, but he ain't. I don't know who he is, the ——! But La Rue here he come in recent, sayin' he didn't have no friend on earth, 'cept me, an' for old time's sake would I let him stay awhile. There's that whole big ranch, his'n by rights, an' he couldn't open his mouth to claim 'er—him bein' wanted for murder. Me bein' good-hearted 'cause I knowed him as a kid, an' knowed his father, I sorta didn't have the heart to turn him off, like I ort. An' my I was 'sprized to see you—" this with a wink at the Marshal—"ride in—"

"That," said La Rue, angrily, weakly, "is a —— lie!"

He struggled, sitting up though still dazed. His face had struck the ground when he had been thrown, and his face was skinned, dirt-covered, dripping blood. He was a scrawny weakling, dark-eyed, dark-haired. He rubbed at his face with a forearm, then touched his face, staring at the blood that came away on his fingers.

"Water—I want some water," he said.

"Fetch him some water," said the Marshal.

"Aw right," said Cunningham, starting.

"You jus' stay here where I can look at yuh," said Buck. "Red'll fetch water."

Cunningham glowered at Buck, again as if aggrieved, as if Buck ought to know that he, Cunningham, was to be trusted, even complimented.

"Let's get him in out of the sun," said the Marshal.

La Rue arose weakly, staggered a little, cursed Cunningham venomously. Then they went into the house and La Rue sat down on a stool, holding his head. Red brought him a dipper of water, and La Rue had to be spoken to twice before he noticed; then he took only two or three sips and wanted no more.

"——, I wisht I'd a killed you!" he said, looking at Cunningham, and continuing to look steadily at Cunningham, went on: "He wasn't to tell anybody I'm La Rue, but he took me to town an' showed me to Barley—that was the day you—" he gestured toward the Marshal—"come in off the train. I saw yuh. I knowed yuh. I made Cunnin'ham there light out for home. He knowed you was there, lookin' for me." La Rue broke off and began cursing, he cursed Cunningham, he cursed himself for a fool, he cursed himself for having missed Cunningham with the rifle.

"He knowed you fellers was comin'!" said La Rue. "He sent ever'body off the ranch this mornin' so they'd just be me an' him here when you come. He don't want his men to know how he double-crossed me, an' he knowed I'd tell, shore. I know now that he sent that Slab Saunders to town late las' night for to tell you I'm here—though I never woke up to it till I saw the Marshal here ride in. An' you, you ——!" he was now talking straight at Cunningham—"you promised you'd make a fight for me, an' see I wasn't took. You'd hide me out, you said. But you wanted me took! I signed a paper givin' you all my rights to the ranch, an' that paper wasn't no good to you as long as I had to stay hid! When I looked through the window there an' saw who was here, ever'thing got clear to me, an' I made up my mind I'd get *you!* You wanted me took so ever'body know I am La Rue, an' not that feller over on the ranch that claims to be. You think now you can claim the ranch! Marshal, make him give up that paper! He's no right to it! He never helped me—he give me up. He knowed he couldn't use that paper," La Rue concluded in an angry whine, "till it was knowed that I am the real La Rue, an' the only way that could be knowed was to give me up—like he done!"

Cunningham started to curse him in reply, but the Marshal said gravely:

"Cunningham, I come for a man an' I got him. I haven't anything to do with yore personal affairs. Now what I want is the loan of a hoss an' saddle to get him to town."

"You are shore welcome!" said Cunningham.

The Mexican boy then went out and

saddled one of Cunningham's horses and brought it up to the house.

La Rue, having washed up and picked up a few small belongings, walked out beside the Marshal who had regarded him without anger, without kindness, and spoke little but quietly.

"I could a-got away if I'd a shot *you*," said La Rue to the Marshal, and the Marshal appeared to think that reply was needless. "But I wanted *him*, the ——! It 's hangin' for me, but I'd a-grinned through the noose if I'd only a-got *him*. You ort to take him too, Marshal. He kep' me, knowin' I was wanted. You orta take him too!"

The Marshal turned, looked hard at Cunningham, then glanced toward Buck and Red.

"Yes, I reckon he does need some little punishment," and the Marshal nodded slightly as if rather of the opinion that Cunningham might get it. "But now we must be ridin'."

The Mexican boy was in the saddle, waiting. Buck and Red still stood near Cunningham. La Rue fumbled weakly at the stirrup, as if this was the first step leading to the gallows and fear was melting his bones. The Marshal helped him on the horse, then mounted.

" 'By, Marshal!" Buck called.

The Marshal turned in the saddle, looked at him, at Red, and answered quietly:

" 'By, boys. I'm right obliged for your help an' company." Then he gave only a casual gesture of parting and started off.

Cunningham gaped at Buck and Red, blurting:

"Ain't you fellers with *him*?" And not waiting for an answer, bellowed: "Hey, Marshal, ain't these here yore men?"

The Marshal reined up, turned, shook his head, saying:

"Why no, they are some boys that were ridin' this way. We come along together."

Then he rode on.

"Who—why I thought—who, *who* are you fellers?" Cunningham demanded.

"Me," said Buck, "I'm a neighbor o' yourn. La Rue o' the Eighty-Eight!"

"Here," said Red, pulling a newspaper from a saddle pocket. "This here 'll tell you all about us—an' some things about yoreself!"

Cunningham with the air of a man hardly knowing what he was about, took the paper, looked at it, gaped, cursed, turned it over as if there might be something on the back explaining this outrage, gazed again at the front page, then crumpled and tore the paper, casting it down, stepping on it, cursing.

"Here," said the impudent Red, "have another 'n. I like to see yuh perform."

Cunningham drew back from the offered newspaper, and stared at Buck who was watching him and looked pleased.

"What d'you mean, comin' over here like this?" Cunningham asked, his voice anything but firm.

"Yeah," said Buck. "That's one o' the things I wanted for to ask you. Some o' yore men have been hangin' round the Eighty-Eight, an'—"

"Have they!" said Cunningham. "I never sent 'em! It was the way you treated Slab an' Windy—they got it in f'r you! It wasn't my doin's. An' you, claimin' to be La Rue!"

"So?" said Buck. "You orta read the papers. Red, give 'im another un. I ain't claimin' official no more to be La Rue. But I'm runnin' the Eighty-Eight, jus' as if I was. Yore friend Saunders there in town this mornin' he took a header into ——, an' 'less you show yoreself right friendly, you may see him, *pronto!*"

"Slab—you shot Slab!"

"I did. An' I'm minded to do the same f'r you. You jus' shell out that bill o' sale to the Eighty-Eight—gettin' bill o' sales to the Eighty-Eight 'pears for to be the fav'rite sport o' such hoss thiefs as you an' Barley. Shell 'er out, quick!"

There was a snap and menace in his voice that made Red glance toward him and suddenly recall that this cheerful and likable companion was, after all, Buck Harrison.

"No!" said Cunningham, desperate at being robbed, hardly knowing what he said.

Buck swung a gun out and up, and his eyes glittered above a cold smile:

"I'll plug yuh, shore!"

"I ain't armed!" Cunningham gasped, raising his thick fat arms.

"It's a ——ofalot I care whether yore armed or unarmed. I come f'r somethin' an' I get 'er, or—"

"I ain't got it! It's in town!" Cunningham yelled. "In the bank—"

"Then I'll jus' shoot you here an' now to have that over with, then ride into town an' —"

Buck shot. Cunningham yelled and fell

lumberingly, groping at his side, groaning.

"Here for—" Red yelled, turning on Buck, cursing. "That ain't—I'm not—I can't be no friends with a feller—"

"Aw shut up," said Buck. "When I shoot a feller, meanin' it, he don't yell an' groan none. I jus' creased his hide, but"—this to Cunningham—"you've set fellers to bushwack me. An' if I don't get what I come for, I'll shoot agin!"

He leveled the gun. Cunningham covered his face with his forearm, turned his head away, and begged.

"I ain't goin' stand for this!" cried Red coming up with hand out to pull at Buck's arm.

"Keep out o' this!" Buck snarled, and there was no doubt about his meaning just what he said. "Keep out o' this! I know what I'm doin'. An' if that bill o' sale is to town, I kill him 'fore I leave this ranch!"

"It's in the box in my room!" yelled Cunningham, wallowing about in the dust. "Go look, Red."

Red, swearing angrily, went hurriedly into the house, into Cunningham's room, and finally under the bunk he found a small iron box. It was heavy, without handles and locked. He dragged it out, lifted it, staggered with it from the house.

"Locked," he said, dropping the box.

"Open 'er up!" said Buck to Cunningham who, in an ungainly way, was trying to sit up.

Red dragged the box nearer to Cunningham, who reached laboriously into his pocket for the key; he fumbled as slowly as he could and seemed about to refuse, but looked at Buck and took out the key. He fitted it to the lock, and raised the lid just enough to admit his hand, then quickly lowered the lid. But before he could turn the key, Buck kicked open the lid. The box was well filled with gold coins.

Cunningham yelled in helpless anger, reached to close the lid, as if somehow that would be protective: but Buck kicked away his hand.

"I see," said Buck triumphantly, "that's the money you keep on hand for to pay killers, huhn? We'll jus' take that along with us, Red, to sorta pay for—"

"We jus' won't!" Red cried savagely. "I won't have no part in stealin'—an' you won't, not with me around!"

Buck turned on him, angered, puzzled, the gun still in his hand.

"Who's runnin' this here?"

"*Me!*" said Red hotly. "We come over here like a pair o' danged fools to do somethin' hones' for that girl, an' luck it has been with us. But I won't, an' by —— you won't touch no cent o' that money—not while I'm here, you won't!"

Buck looked at him long, hard, doubtfully; then slowly—

"What you goin' do about it if I say yes?"

"I won't let yuh, that's all. I jus' won't. I won't have nothin' to do with stealin'. I jus' won't!"

"You are shore a funny kid," said Buck, mystified, putting away the gun but continuing to stare at him. "You know who I am. You've stuck like ——, an' yet you won't—there's more'n two years' hard-earned wages here f'r you."

"Not if they was twenty years! It ain't how much—it's I jus' won't, never! For no —— man, I won't!"

"There yuh are," said Buck, turning on Cunningham. "Look at him careful, 'cause prob'ly you never saw no hones' man before."

Buck stooped, picked up the paper, opened it, read slowly, muttering the words as a man does when he can not read rapidly. He tore the paper repeatedly in two and threw down the pieces. Then he looked doubtfully at the iron box, up at Red, and seemed hesitating.

Abruptly Buck spoke to Cunningham:

"I orta shoot yuh. Usual I do what I orta that away. Now if you've got any sense a-tall, the which I allow you ain't, you 'll stay clear away from the Eighty-Eight. If you don't, I'll come agin sometime an' do more 'n crease yore hide. All right, kid. Le' 's be ridin'!"

Buck mounted, and Red, very thoughtful and discouraged, climbed on the big black.

Then at a trot they started off.

Cunningham scrambled with a kind of bear-like awkwardness to his feet, and tried to run as he hurried into the house. He grabbed up the rifle, the same that had been picked up from where it had fallen out of La Rue's hand, and resting it against the doorway took aim, took a long aim, but he did not shoot. Buck was quite a distance off. Cunningham knew that he was not a good shot.

Then Cunningham felt of his side. The flesh had been gouged, it bled freely and did hurt. He sat down and cursed himself

bitterly. This appeared to be the end of what he had deeply planned to get the best of everybody, to get the Eighty-Eight for himself. In his thick-headed way he had planned carefully, shrewdly, even to sending his men away from the ranch for the day so they would not know how he had double-crossed La Rue, whose identity they had not known anyhow. Most of Cunningham's men were wanted for something or other, and each would have felt that when it suited Cunningham, any one of them might be given up to detectives or sheriff.

"I—I don't know what to do," said Cunningham. "But I'll git that feller!"

Then a thought came to him, and he went out of the house, got down on his knees and began picking up and searching about for the bits of paper into which Buck had torn the bill of sale.

IT WAS some time after nightfall when Buck and Red reached the Eighty-Eight. They had ridden without much talk between them. Once Buck had sworn at him and said:

"I jus' can't figger you a-tall. I'd trust you almost more'n anybody. You knowed I am Buck Harrison an' wanted, bad. Yet when I got a chanct to grab some gold from a feller like Cunnin'ham, you r'ared up. An' if it ain't *stealin'* for to steal a man's paper to a big ranch, what is—huhn?"

And Red answered:

"I like you as a feller, fine. But I don't like yore ways. Like I tol' you, I'm workin' for the Eighty-Eight an' her as owns it. I never stole nothin' in my life. You gotta live with yoreself after you spend what you 've stole."

"I ain't never had no great argyments with myself," said Buck.

"You ort 've had cause you 're a fine feller, natural. But you got wrong idees. Shootin' Cunnin'ham like you done is one of 'em."

"I never hurt him much."

"Tain't that. You 'd took his gun offen him."

"What the —— good would it have done him to have a gun? I thought he was lyin' 'bout that paper bein' in town. An' see, he was."

"Wasn't right nohow, what you done. An' you know it!"

"—— yore onery soul," said Buck. "I don't know why I like you so much when you make me plumb mad!"

As they reached the ranch house they were hailed from the darkness, and Buck answered with a peculiar long shrill whistle.

They were met by Buck's father who came out of the shadows, erect and quietly, with a Winchester in the crook of his arm.

"Ever'thing been quiet, Dad?"

"Some visitors but no shootin'."

"Who come?"

"Some folks yesterday, one today. Yesterday some men rode by an' stopped. A speckle-faced fellow name o' Jones. Blade Jones he said. Said his pardner, man name o' Walker, had been bushwacked. 'Peared to blame Cunnin'ham. But this Jones had left his ranch go, was takin' his punchers an' ridin' South to Jake Spencer's. Said he'd heard Spencer was havin' trouble. Said when he was all through helpin' Spencer he was comin' back this away an' put in the rest o' his life makin' Cunnin'ham wisht he'd never been born."

"That Jake Spencer he must be a man," said Buck. "Ever'body as hears he's in trouble 'pears to light out to help 'im!"

"Yes," said Boyd, "an' now that you boys are back, I'm ridin' down tonight to give Jake what help I can."

"You! ——, we may be havin' some need o' help here soon. Me an' Red here, we rode down on Cunnin'ham today an—"

"So I knowed. An' when I heard you come in I thought you 'd settled with him, maybe."

"How on earth did you know that?"

"A woman. She rode in this afternoon. Said her name was Nora an' as how you 'd gone—"

"Nora! That girl? She here? What the—"

"You'll have to ask her that. But she told me there was news in town that the Harrison gang it had been wiped out."

"It's all right to speak up plain, Dad. Red here he knows who we are."

In the starlight Red could see the tall grim old outlaw turn toward him and stare doubtfully; then:

"Was you thinkin' some o' throwin' in with us?"

"I was not!" said Red with feeling.

"Which is just as well, 'cause the Harrison gang it is no more. Buck, take old Jake Spencer. For forty year ever' man that has knowed him has knowed that he was square an' not afraid, knowed he would allus stay by a friend; an' now, like you jus'

said, Jake bein' in trouble, all them as know him are ridin' over to help. Me, I'm goin' over too. Part because I owe that to him. Part, too, because the sooner he wins out the sooner there'll be men free to ride in here, like that Blade Jones an' his young punchers, an' work for Eighty-Eight. Spencer, too, he'll come when he knows the truth as I mean for to tell him. Then you an' me, Buck, we'll be ridin' far where we ain't much knowed about—up Wyoming way, I think, an' start agin."

"Dad, the truth she's been told—most of it. Did you see that piece me an' Red had put in the paper?"

"I seen it. The girl she gave me one. Now my hoss he is up, fed, watered, with the saddle lyin' by. I'm ready for to go."

BUCK said to Red as they tramped up toward the house:

"Now what the —— can that girl Nora want here, you reckon?"

"Ask 'er," said Red.

"Yo're right. I will."

"An' whatever she tells yuh, don't b'lieve it."

"Why?"

"Cause she ain't the sort o' lady a man orta b'lieve."

"She 's been purty square toward me."

"You bet," said Red.

"I thought you liked 'er?"

"I shore do. But jus' 'cause I like somebody ain't no reason a-tall for b'lievin' what they tell me."

"You've got funny idees. What you talkin' about now?"

"Why, she's up to somethin' or she wouldn't be here."

"How you figger that?"

"I don't figger it," said Red. "I jus' know it. When somebody is where they don't b'long, they're up to somethin', ain't they?"

"I reckon. You go into the kitchen an' fry some grub. An' I'll go right straight an' ask 'er."

Nora was in the room with Jane and her mother, and neither Jane nor Mrs. Allen knew quite what to make of her. She was of a class that Mrs. Allen did not know much about, but distrusted and disliked; yet Mrs. Allen was a kindly woman and could do nothing else than be courteous to the lone strange girl who at first gave no explanation of why she had come, but told vividly, entertainingly, of what had been going on in town, and showed a copy of the newspaper she, Buck and Red had got out.

Jane eyed her with great curiosity, knowing that she was one of Red's "wantin' " women.

When Jane had learned that Buck was not her cousin she did not know whether she was glad or sorry; but said impulsively:

"Mother, I never did understand before why Uncle George changed his name from Allen to La Rue, and if he stole from Buck's father, then Buck does have a right to some of the ranch! And after all he's done for us, I'm going to see that he gets it!"

Nora smiled a little superiorly and said nothing.

"Such complications!" said Mrs. Allen. "I am quite dazed."

"That ain't all. Not by a long shot!" said Nora, rolling a cigaret.

"Not all!" exclaimed Mrs. Allen.

"What else can be?" asked Jane.

"His name is not only Boyd, like it says there in the paper. But he is—" this a little triumphantly—"Buck Harrison, too!"

Mother and daughter regarded her blankly for a moment; then Jane asked: "You mean Buck Harrison, that awful man?"

"Sure. That's him. The train robber!"

Mrs. Allen felt like screaming a little—to think that she had been that near a *train robber*, of whom there had often been accounts in the Eastern papers.

"I don't believe it," said Jane.

"And that Mr. Red," asked Mrs. Allen. "Is he one too?"

"No," said Nora, "he's just a cowboy. You see, nobody there in town but me knew that Buck was Buck Harrison, though now they've found out. That's why I came to warn him, so he can run, get away."

"Were you in this plot too, to steal the ranch?" Jane inquired, feeling very strongly that she did not like this woman. "My uncle hadn't robbed your father, too, had he?"

"Jane!" said Mrs. Allen reprovingly.

"But Mother, I merely wanted to know. It seems that everybody in this awful country, but us, has a claim on this ranch!"

"Yes," said Nora complacently. "Cunningham has a bill of sale, signed by the real La Rue. May I have a match?" she asked, holding up the cigaret, and Mrs. Allen, not

used to seeing a woman smoke, reluctantly gave her one. "And I," said Nora, as she struck the match, "don't want any part of the ranch." She puffed on the cigaret and added: "It's too unlucky, this ranch. There was your uncle, an' young Larry, Saunders too—I told you what happened to him. And now Buck. No, this ranch is a joner. Yes."

"I am not superstitious," said Jane, defiantly.

"Oh," said Nora, "there isn't any need for *you* to be. The ranch isn't yours yet, and won't be unless the will is found."

It was perfectly plain to both mother and daughter that Nora was being wilfully disagreeable, and they were mystified. Mrs. Allen felt a kind of distressed puzzlement, but Jane was incensed. She did not at all understand that Nora regarded her as a rival, and would not have understood had she known. Her interest in both Buck and Red was merely a strong liking, a very strong liking indeed, for two odd fellows who were amusing, generous and courageous. She particularly liked "Mr. Red"; but the idea of love had not occurred to her, even unconsciously.

The door of the room was open. They heard Buck's steps, and not quite sure of whom it might be, all of them turned watchfully.

"'Lo folks!" he called from the darkness, and a moment later stood in the full lamplight at the open doorway. Then to Nora: "What the —— you doin' here?"

She sprang up, excitedly, saying:

"Waiting for you! They suspect in town who you are. As soon as I learned that, I made for the ranch. If you start now you can get away!"

Buck frowned, but took the news with a disappointing composure.

"Yeah?"

"Yes. I rode hard to get here, an' have been nearly crazy waiting. They'll lynch *me* when they find out!"

"How'd they learn?" asked Buck.

"I don't know, but I heard them talking!"

"Who?"

"Barley an' Aquillar!"

"Yeah? *Aquillar?* Where?"

"In the hotel," said Nora. "About an hour after you had gone. I was coming down the stairs—they were below. I listened over the banisters. Aquillar said, 'A fellow who claims to know just told me he is Buck Harrison. We'd better get some men and ride out after him.' That's what I heard. Then I got a horse an' come!"

"Shore it was Aquillar hisself?"

"Why I came right down the stairs and looked at both of them, straight in the eye!"

Buck very nearly said, "What you want to lie like that for?" but he merely looked at her wonderingly.

Then Jane spoke up—

"She said that you are Buck Harrison, the—the train robber!"

"Everybody knows it in town—it's no secret now," said Nora defensively. "You've got to run. An' me too!"

"*Are* you Buck Harrison?" Jane asked insistently.

"Yeah. I am." Then he seemed to wait for her comment.

"Well," said Jane, "I don't care!"

"An' you, miss," Buck told her. "You ain't goin' to have no more argyments as to who owns this ranch. The Marshal is takin' Larry La Rue back to Texas to be hung, an' then you 'll be the only heir anyhow."

"How awful!" said Jane.

"How perfectly awful!" Mrs. Allen echoed.

"You, you are Buck Harrison?" Jane said, half fascinated. "You—you don't look—look like I thought he—"

"Looks they're deceivin', miss. I'm a turrible feller when I'm hungry. An' I'm so hungry right now I got to get to the kitchen where Red he is a gettin' supper."

He turned away, and Nora followed quickly, and hurrying up beside him caught his arm, asking anxiously—

"Ain't you going to run?"

"Yeah, I reckon. Soon."

"They'll know it was me that brought you word," said Nora.

"Yeah?"

"An' Buck, you must take me with you! You see what all I've done for you. There in town I kept still when I knew who you were. Then I sent word for you to come when I found out about La Rue—and now, Buck, I come out as hard as I could to save you! They may be here anytime. We ought to start now!"

"I can't take no woman!"

"You've got to take me!"

"——afire, when I go I ride fast an' long. Besides—"

"You love *her*. You've done everything

for *her*. You're stayin' on here because of *her!* I hope you are caught!"

"You go back there an' set down. I got a-think an' I'm hungry. You go back an' we'll talk after while."

"I won't go back in there," said Nora. "They don't like me!"

"What's got into you? You didn't ack thisaway in town."

"I've been a fool! I come out to warn you. If you stay, you'll get caught. You've got to go, an' you've got to take me with you!"

"Me I'm hungrier 'an a wolf," he said, taking the first excuse that came to his mind. "You wait till I talk to Red. I've gota think."

He paused as if to say something more, then walked off hurriedly.

Nora came near to running after him, then feeling that she too wanted to think, walked about for a time and sat down on an overturned barrel, and with chin to palm gazed moodily into the darkness.

Buck hurried through the dining-room to the kitchen end of it where Red was dabbling with a fork at sliced potatoes sizzling in a pan.

"What's up?" asked Red. "You look funny."

"—— it is broke loose!" said Buck, looking over his shoulder. "Nora she says she heard Barley an' Aquillar talkin' there at the hotel right after we left—they know I'm Buck Harrison, she says."

"Gosh, then you'd better light out a whoopin'!"

"So she says, but—"

"But," Red interrupted, "how could she a-heard Aquillar—him twenty mile from town there—"

"That's jus' it! I hate awful to call a woman like her a liar so I ain't mentioned it none."

"Why," asked Red, "you reckon she wants to lie thataway?"

"I'll tell yuh, an' if you grin, I'll shoot you, shore! She wants me to light out an' take her with me! I don't want no woman—you're lettin' them 'taters burn."

Red jerked the skillet to the back of the stove and stirred vigorously.

"Dealin' with men," said Buck, "I don't offen have to wonder much what to say to 'em, but her—what am I goin' do?"

"I reckon you'd better light out. Maybe she did hear somethin'."

"Maybe she tol' somethin'," said Buck skeptically. "It's all because I didn't take her money that time there on the train. I orta have took it. What am I goin' do?"

"Tell 'er we seen Aquillar."

"I reckon. You go call 'er, an' you tell 'er."

"You go. Me, I'm cookin'. 'Sides, it's yore affair. She don't want to *e*-lope with me!"

Buck swore vigorously and reluctantly went outside and called. Nora answered at once.

"Come along in," he said.

She came, a little dejected and still, somehow, a little defiant, and eyed Red as if suspecting that he was against her.

"Howdy," said Red. "Will yuh eat?"

"No."

"Set down," said Buck.

Nora looked about, sat down deliberately, and gazed at him with reproach.

"Miss," said Buck, "I hate powerful for to say this here, but you never heard Aquillar an' Barley talkin'. No ma'am!"

"I did!"

"No you didn't, neither, 'cause we met Aquillar this mornin' out on the range an—"

"I don't care if you did, I heard what I heard. I don't believe you anyhow! You two have made it up—you didn't meet him. What I said I heard is the truth—I swear to —— an'—"

"Aw now lissen," said Red coaxingly. "We like you fine, both of us—but we met Aquillar like he says. You couldn't a-heard him!"

"Well what of it?" Nora demanded in a blazing temper. "You men rode off an' left me there in town to get all the blame. I couldn't stay. I had to go some place. I thought you were friends! An' I had to say something about why I come, so I said that. An' I bet they *do* find out in town that you are Buck Harrison. Serves me right, trying to do something for you!"

"Have some 'taters an' bacon," said Red, sliding a plate across the table and holding the pan in readiness to serve her.

She struck the plate away and jumped up.

"No! I hate you, both of you! I hope you *are* caught—both of you!"

She left the room, hurriedly, while Buck simply stood and stared, not knowing in the least what to make of her.

"That," said Red, lifting a mouthful of potatoes on the end of his knife, holding them poised while he spoke, "That is what yuh git allus for catchin' a woman in a lie. An' yore allus in the wrong when yuh argy with a woman—*allus!*"

CHAPTER XII

BATTLE

THE next morning Mrs. Allen and Jane were still half bewildered by the incomprehensible situation of being under the protection of a noted, and likable, outlaw. The likable part was particularly mystifying to Mrs. Allen, who had the feeling that lawbreakers must be especially villainous in appearance and deed.

The daughter and mother were also puzzled, and rather indignant, at Nora whose attitude had been so wilfully disagreeable; and whose reason for being at the ranch they could not understand after learning that there was nothing to the story she had told about overhearing the Mexican sheriff say that he was going to get a posse and ride after Buck.

Buck himself brooded uneasily. Because he was not brutal enough to be ungrateful for the way she had befriended him, nor weak enough to saddle himself with a woman that he did not want, he felt awkward, did not know what to say or how to act, and so avoided her; and greatly wished himself a hundred miles off.

Nora in turn felt a sense of humiliation that she half disguised by a defiant bearing and scornful glances. One moment she wanted to leave the ranch, and the next did not want to leave the ranch. She was restrained too by the knowledge that Buck would be suspicious of her intentions if she did call for her horse; and she did not want him to be suspicious. She was a humiliated, tormented, angered woman, but still in love.

Red was down at the blacksmith shop, mending a buckboard wheel.

Nora came near, sat down on an overturned bucket, and looked at him.

"Fine mornin', ain't it?" said Red agreeably.

Nora eyed him sullenly, but he whistled and hammered away, ignoring her sullenness.

Presently she said:

"I hope he is caught. I hate him. A woman always gets the worst of it!"

"You shore are right," said Red.

"Why do you say that?" she asked angrily. "You don't mean it. You don't believe it."

Red paused, looking toward her with an expression of mild surprize.

"Usual, I mean what I say. To you women folks allus. I never lie needless. It's a bad habit for to git yoreself into. Now I was jus' thinkin' when yuh come up, 'Miss Nora, she meant to do Buck a good turn. If she had a-heard Barley an' the sher'ff talkin' she would a come a-rampin', the which would a-been mighty fine.' "

"Do you think he would have taken me with him then?"

"No 'am. Not him."

"Why?"

"Cause he don't want yuh," said Red, who never lied to women, needlessly.

"What's wrong with *me?*" she demanded.

"Nothin'. Yore awright. But when Buck rides he travels fas' an' far. He don't want no woman."

"I bet he would take *her!*" said Nora.

"I bet he wouldn't. Why, she ain't hardly ever been on hoss-back! He'd look fine wouldn't he, ridin' off with somebody he had to hold in the saddle!"

"Oh I don't mean that," said Nora. "He'd like to take her. He loves her."

"Yore crazy. If he did he would. He does what he wants, that feller."

Nora threw her cigaret away, and brooded for a time; then she arose and came close to Red. Her dark eyes were narrowed and bright, and she spoke in almost a whisper, tensely:

"You, that night there in the saloon, remember what you said about Buck Harrison? If you ever met him your hand would be against him—that's what you said! An' you—when people do find out about him, they are going to put you down as one of the gang *unless you do something!* Why don't you get him? It's the only way you can save your own neck. You know that?"

"Gosh!" said Red, staring at her. Then again, "Gosh!"

"You know it's so! I wish I'd given him up there in town!"

"Gosh, woman, you mean you want me to shoot a feller I like?"

"No, *no*—not that. But get the drop on him, tie him up. I'll help you. You've

seen how he treats me after all I've done for him! He'll do the same to you. When he's caught he'll say you are one of the gang. It's the only way we can save ourselves. You do it. You will do it, won't you? I'll help an'—"

"You git away from me! Plumb away! I don't like how you talk!"

"You are in with him! You are one of the gang! You just pretended to meet him there in town that night. You can't fool me—you didn't fool me!"

"I ain't. An' it's easy for me to talk a lot, but, times, it's hard to say what I mean. Now I'd be jus' as low-down mean to think of catchin' Buck as I would 'a' been that night to think I wouldn't catch 'im if I had a chanct. You can't tell two minutes ahead what sorta feelin' is goin' be right—like I was feelin' sorry for you a while ago, but now I ain't— I liked you fine, but—"

Red threw down the hammer and without another word started off in the long swaying awkward stride of a cowboy in a hurry.

"Red? Red?" she called anxiously. "Where you goin'?"

He answered without pausing:

"For to tell Buck to be a-ridin'!"

"Don't tell him I—Red! Wait! I didn't mean—honest—*Red!* I only wanted to see if you would—Red, please—"

But he broke into a run and would not look back.

Then Nora leaned weakly against the blacksmith shop and gazed after him with a kind of hopeless anger, angry at herself, at Red, at Buck, at life, at woman's fate.

"HO THERE!" said Buck as Red came round a corner of the house. "I was jus' gettin' ready to look for you. I'm ridin', *pronto!*" And Buck gestured at the two horses standing there near the house; one was saddled, the other carried a pack.

"You orta be," said Red.

"I'm hatin' to go an' leave you here alone. But I don't think you'll have no trouble. Anyhow I've got to light out soon, so I might as well be travelin'. I can't stand no longer bein' near her."

"Nora she's gone loco," said Red. "She's talkin' crazy-like. Jus' now she was a-sayin—"

"I'm goin' over by way of Spencer's," Buck cut in, not wanting to hear what Nora might have said. "Pick up my dad—maybe help Jake some if he still needs any help. Then me an' dad'll lay back in the hills till all's quiet hereabouts. I feel kinda sneakin' for to quit you thisaway, but Red, when I get the feelin' strong I'd better go—then I'd better!"

"Me, I got it too. You'd better awright. Nora she's—"

"I ain't goin' say 'By' to them women," Buck interrupted. "I'd feel a fool. Walk over here to where my hosses is—"

They walked to the horses. Buck's saddle was on one, with the Winchester in the scabbard. The pack was on the other, with another Winchester there, and a goodly supply of ammunition that the Harrisons had always tried to have with them in case they were caught out somewhere and had to make a long stand. As long as cartridges held out the Harrison gang had never been in fear of being taken alive.

"I've took a pinch 'r two o' grub," said Buck, giving the diamond hitch a pull by way of testing its tautness. "Not much. I'm a heap used to not eatin' between jumps—"

Red was not listening. He stood rigidly looking off toward the horse pasture, watching, not quite sure that he had seen something.

In a moment Buck broke off, saying—

"What's that?"

"Yeah. I thought I seen somethin' too."

"No, not where you're lookin'—but over there! Down in that arroyo beyond the corral I saw a *hat!*"

"Me, over there," said Red, "I *thought* I saw a hoss with a saddle in the pasture—for a minute, just a hoss with a saddle!"

"Then it's come!" said Buck with the outlaw's sensitive instinct for danger. "They 're surroundin' the ranch!" He leaped for the Winchester in his saddle scabbard, saying quickly: "Cut off that pack an' get it into the house. We 'll need the shells. They 're sneakin' in from all sides, I bet! Cunnin'ham has come—an' won't them fellers get smoked-up!"

As he was speaking Buck took out his knife, opened the blade with his teeth for the right hand held the Winchester, muzzle up, poised, ready to shoot. He slashed the rope. The packs fell.

"You orta gone sooner!" said Red. "Las' night!"

"Then where'd you be now? I bet they 're

a dozen men—grab up that other Winchester an' this here box o' shells—we've got to—"

Some watcher, seeing that these men were alarmed before the attackers had got close up to the ranch, now shot at long range. The bullet hit the ground and sang viciously as it spun in a ricochet overhead.

"Come on, kid!" Buck yelled. "The circus it is—no, not there—into the woman's room—too many winders there—"

Men had been trying to creep unseen and surround the house, get in at close range, for they knew very well that if these fellows got in behind adobe walls it would be hard to get them out. When the first shot was fired, other men, instead of longer trying to keep under cover as they closed in, got into the open as fast as they could to see what was going on.

"A dozen!" Red yelled, looking from side to side as he ran, and seeming to see horsemen leaping into view in every direction, and figures on foot popping up nearer the ranch house. "They's a hundred!" he cried in the exaggeration of excitement.

Rifles smashed away at them from far off. Bullets knocked pit-like marks into the adobe walls, kicked up the sandy earth, and as he stumbled on a stone a bullet carried away Red's hat. No one was close enough for six-gun work, and Buck, firing as he ran, hardly touching his shoulder with the butt of the rifle, either hit a man or two, or made them duck to the ground, besides the one fellow that he knocked from the saddle. Buck paused at the doorway, shooting to the right and left, waiting for Red, telling him to get inside; then as Red paused to look about, Buck gave a shove and sent him lurching through, almost knocking over Mrs. Allen who had come to the door while Jane peered through one of the deep narrow windows.

Nora had run toward the house. She pushed breathlessly by, and leaning against the wall, gasped, out of breath, but looked about her with eyes blazing.

Buck closed the door and barred it.

"They can get clost to us, but they can't get nowhere to shoot in at us that we can't shoot out at them, so it's broad as it's long," said Buck. "And we are shore in for one big fight."

He peered from a window, then with a flash of movement raised the rifle and fired. "Aw high!" he said in disgust, and instantly shot again, adding, "That's better!"

Red, with rifle poised, peered from the window of the opposite wall. "Regular Injuns—way they hide," he muttered; then, getting sight of an incautious figure, shot.

Mrs. Allen shrank into a corner. Her face was as white as if her skin had turned to flour, and she held her palms against her ears to shut out the deafening sound of the rifles. She stared in a kind of wondering fright, not at all aware that she was repeating in a moaning inflection, "Oh-oh-oh!"

Jane stood against the wall, confused and staring, seeming aghast as she realized unwillingly that this was a fight, a real fight in which men shot to kill.

Nora peered through the window over Red's shoulder.

"Git back!" said Red, pushing at her.

"I won't!" she answered defiantly, then stepped back.

"You women," Buck told them, "set down in corners—get low down—you 'll be safe. We can keep 'em off here a week!"

Rifles were banging away. Some of them had got into positions that were sheltered from the view of the windows, and they fired rapidly and uselessly, but as if liking the noise they made. Others, more like sharp-shooters, took advantage of what cover they could find, and getting into line with the windows sent in bullet after bullet that struck against the inside wall, showering adobe.

"These women orta be out! —— such men!" said Buck.

Red did not answer. He was crouched just below a window, looking up, waiting. Some good marksman was methodically pouring bullets through the window.

"Why don't the dang fool wait till he sees my head?" Red grumbled, disapproving of such poor judgment on the part of a man who could shoot so well. But in a moment Red muttered: "But if I have to keep my head down I can't see nothin'! Maybe that's what he's after. I won't have it!"

Red stepped back, crouching. "I won't have it!" he repeated rashly, and peeked through a lower corner of the window. A bullet narrowly missed him, but a puff of smoke showed where the marksman lay, and with his rifle resting on the window, Red opened fire, fighting it out like a duelist, blazing away recklessly, again, again, again, then the hammer snapped. The rifle was empty. Red swore, turned, looking for shells.

"Here!" cried Nora, snatching at the rifle. She held shells in one hand, and said excitedly, "I 'll load it!"

"Did you get him, Red?" Buck asked, then paused with a long glance toward Nora who in preoccupied nervous excitement was filling the magazine of the empty rifle while Red, having drawn his six-shooter, stood by the window.

"Don't know, but he's keepin' quiet. Maybe I knocked dust in his eyes!"

"Here!" Nora shouted, thrusting the rifle she had just loaded at Buck. "Give me that one of yours—I'll load it!"

A bullet struck near Buck's head, scattering the adobe over him; but he did not notice as with a kind of staring thoughtfulness he exchanged rifles with Nora, and he continued for a moment to look at her as she hurriedly loaded the gun.

Mrs. Allen had sunk down into a corner; she was trembling with fright, but she was now silent. She would put her hands to her ears, then to her eyes, then again to her ears. Outside there was much shouting, and the *thud*, *pung* and *jarr* of bullets against the walls seemed nearly as rapid as the fall of hail.

Buck swore in astonishment, for in the distance he had caught sight of other men, at least fifteen or twenty, riding toward the ranch.

"Must have an army!" he said, puzzled.

Jane too was in a corner, beside her mother, but standing. She shivered, watching as if in a daze. Suddenly she bent toward her mother and tried to scream, but her throat was too contracted for screaming.

"Mother, they 're fighting for us—for us!" she said huskily, as if she had suddenly realized what it was all about. "They 're fighting those dreadful men!" Jane bent down, caught her mother, repeating, "They 're fighting for us!"

"They 's shore a mess of 'em out there," said Red, "from the noise they make!"

He had returned his revolver to its holster and held the rifle.

Buck paused with head cocked, listening:

"They 're gettin' into the bunkroom, there! Hear 'em!"

For a moment those within the little room paused alertly; they could hear shouts, the gallop of horses, the staccato babble of high-pitched voices. The attackers had approached under shelter of the ranch house and were entering the bunkhouse.

"Well they can't get us from there any more 'n we can get them," said Buck. He stepped to the door that opened into this bunkroom, a heavy door, heavily barred on their side. "An' this here door—if they don't chop holes in it an' go to shootin' through—might get the women. —— such men! You women get up there on each side that door, close up—"

Mrs. Allen looked weakly to where he pointed, but she did not move. The effort of moving seemed too much. Jane had come to the side of Nora and said:

"Show me how—I'll load guns too. I want to help."

There was an increasing babble and trampling inside the bunkroom. The gallop of horses was heard as more men rode up, approaching from an angle that kept them from being fired on from the windows; and all the while firing went on against the room, and Red, ducking from side to side of the window, returned the fire.

"We're jus' as safe here as they are there!" said Buck.

THERE was a heavy hammering on the door; the voices within the bunkroom dropped as a deep voice, close to the door, shouted:

"Within that room there, you, Buck Harrison!"

Buck swore, and he glanced to the right and left in a kind of surprize, then answered—

"Yeah?"

"This is the Sheriff, Aquillar! We have you surrounded—you 'd better come out!"

"Yeah I reckon you have awright!" Then, looking about him: "They know it 's me. That's why there 's so many an'—"

"Will you come out?" demanded Aquillar.

"When I come I'll come a-shootin'!"

Voices of men who had been listening rose:

"Come on then!"—"Dare yuh to come!"—"Yo're a goner!"—"Jus' you step out, you ——!"

Another voice, deep with a kind of angry triumph, bawled—

"We 've got you, Buck Harrison, you ——!"

Buck answered—

"Is Cunnin'ham around too!"

"Yes," answered Sheriff Aquillar. "And more than fifty men. Do you give in?"

"Have you ever heard anything what makes you think I would?" Buck inquired.

"You 'll be killed!"

"I reckon," Buck acknowledged. Then, loudly: "You goin' let the folks out that's in here with me? They's women here!"

He could hear voices, loud with surprize: "Women?" There were oaths and a kind of quarreling. Some of the men who had rode up after the attack opened did not know that women, too, were in the room. In the hubbub there were shouts of "The women throwed in with him!"—"There ain't no women there!"—others protested: "I don't shoot at no women!"—"Let 'em git out!"—"He won't give 'em up!"—"Don't let him give hisself up—kill the ——!"

"Will you let the women come out?" Aquillar shouted.

"I want 'em out o' here!" Buck shouted back.

Then a hoarse and heavy voice at the door bellowed, just cursing. It was Cunningham's voice. He cursed Buck up and down, and continued to curse until out of breath, though some men shouted at him, "Shet up, you! They 's women in there!" Cunningham turned on some of the men, quarreling with them. In the fragments of what he overheard, Buck could tell that Cunningham was claiming the right to make this attack as he pleased, that his men had been the first to reach the ranch and begin the fight, that moreover he owned the Eighty-Eight.

Red stood warily on guard at his window, shooting from time to time. Voices and arguments did not trouble him, did not interest him. This was a fight.

But Buck thoughtfully looked about at those within the room with him; then he said:

"This here ain't a fight for the Eighty-Eight no more as much as agin me, personal. So Red, you an' the ladies here 'll have to get out. They 'll get me I reckon—they 's so —— many of 'em, but there 'll be a pile o' funerals when the smoke she blows away!"

Bang—bang—bang! went Red's rifle out of the window.

"You ladies—" Buck's voice dropped a little, and the tone was tensely earnest—"you' ve got to lie like——for Red there, an' say he never knowed I was Buck Harrison till he heard Aquillar speak up jus' now. Else she 'll look bad for him. I don't want him to get into trouble over me bein' Buck Harrison—"

Red was not listening; he was shooting.

There was impatient pounding on the door, and voices yelling to know what was going on, and what was Harrison going to do?

"I'm gettin' these folks ready to get out, when you stop them fools that's wastin' their bullets. Somebody 'll get hit comin' out the front door!"

Men continued to fire against the walls; most of these marksmen lay at safe angles, and shot uselessly, perhaps feeling that shooting might discourage the outlaw, make him willing to give up, or perhaps they liked to hear their own guns going off.

"Do we have a truce a while?" somebody yelled.

"No," Buck answered. "You don't get no truce. Ary man I see I shoot!"

"Let's have a man to ride 'round to them as are shootin' an' tell 'em to stop while the women come out!" a voice called.

"No! Climb up on the roof an' yell!" Buck answered.

"It's the women! We don't want to hurt no women!"

"You'd better not!" said Buck, who as he talked kept watch at his window.

Voices went up:

"Them women have got to come out or they 'll get hurt"— "We mean to git you!"—"An' that reward too!"

Sounds and voices reached them as of an angry Babel, tones of protest high with the word, "*women!*" Others, "They throwed in with him, I bet!" Oaths and wrathful: "Don't let him give hisself up!" Some: "To —— with the women if they won't come out!" Still others: "He won't let 'em out—think to keep us from shootin'!" Savage: "Like —— it will!" Others: "Women—don't hurt no women!" Cunningham's unmistakable bellow: "Them women are loadin' an' shootin' for 'im! They're all in together—ranch—steal—By —— I'm runnin' this here!"

Men outside were shouting, and two or three, taking Buck's advice, did climb on the roof and yelled and gestured. The firing slackened; here and there a rifle continued; then the shooting stopped.

Aquillar again beat on the door, and said: "Send out the women!"

"Open that there door," said Buck, indicating the outside door. "Jus' wide

enough to slip out—but careful, there's liable to be somebody there, waitin'!"

Mrs. Allen arose weakly. She groaned and fumbled.

"I'm not going," said Nora, flatly.

"Me neither," said Red. "Naw."

"Yo're crazy!" Buck told him. "This is agin me, an' they'll get me this time I reckon. Yore stayin' won't help me none nohow, an' you ain't goin' throw in with no outlaw like me, *now!*"

"I don't care who you are," said Red. "You an' me been friends. I stick."

"They'll get us, both!"

"I ain't scairt none," Red answered stubbornly. "Them out there, I've fought 'em an' I hate 'em. An' I ain't goin' out to 'em with my tail between my legs—jus' to keep myself from gettin' hurt some. I ain't!" He said it sullenly, stubbornly, awkwardly. He would stick and that was all there was to it.

Voices were shouting in angry impatience; there was pounding on the door, many-voiced calls: "What's goin' on there?"—"Why don't you let the women out?"—"You keepin' 'em to protect yorself?"—"Naw they're stayin' to help!"— "They ain't no women there— He's foolin' us!" Curses and threats rose.

"I'm not going either!" Nora repeated, touching Buck's arm, attracting his attention.

"You ain't! Why?"

She answered with a kind of anger:

"Because when I come here to get you to take me away, I meant to stand by you no matter what happened. You see *now* I was right, you ought 've gone! I'm going to stay anyhow, just to show you!"

"Yo're loco! You—Red, you—crazy-loco!" To Mrs. Allen and Jane: "You open that door an' get out or—"

Some fellow, more audacious than the others, had crept safely along the wall and gun in hand reached the window. With gun ready he straighted up, looked within, and as he shot Buck sprang aside as if touched by a spring, drawing his revolver as he jumped. The fellow ducked down, out of sight, but Buck recklessly leaned far from the window, shot him, and jumped back as the watchers outside blazed away the merest shadow of an instant too late. But yells went up. This shooting was like a signal to others, and the rifles began again. The men in the bunkhouse stormed, some protesting, others ragefully demanding that they get Harrison anyhow they could.

Some shouted angrily that they wouldn't fire a shot as long as the women were in there. Others answered, "Fools! They 're in with him—throwed in with him!" and still others told these men who would fire a shot to get out o' the bunkhouse because they were going to break in the door. Somebody at close range opened fire on the door with a rifle, and bullets splintered through. Men yelled in protest that the women might be hurt, and others, "To —— with the women," and called them names of debauched women.

The attack was furious. Buck felt they were meaning to unhinge the door, crash it in. The women, if not killed, would then be safe enough. He himself would be killed for there was no other way of getting him. He glanced at Red, rifle in hand, peering from the side of the window.

Buck stepped behind Red, drew his revolver, and from behind struck him over the head with the barrel of his gun.

Jane screamed and Nora cried out. Mrs. Allen stared in horror, her mouth open, trying to cry out, but she could not. Then she pressed her hands tightly against her eyes.

Buck spoke jerkily, pausing between phrases as he glanced quickly from window to window:

"I had to do—to do it!" *Bang bang!* "They would a-killed him—or hung 'im!" *Bang!* "You—you women, you 've got to say he didn't know—didn't know I was Buck Harrison—so I laid him out—thought I'd killed him—" *Bang!* "Was afraid he'd get me. They won't want to believe it *—you 've got to make 'em!* It's all I could do for 'im!"

Repeated shots from a rifle striking one spot on the door had frayed a hole and the bullets came through almost as if fired point blank.

Buck cursed, and shouted:

"You, Miz Allen—git over there on that bunk—other side the door—git—" *Bang bang!* "Git close to the wall—all you women!"

Buck jerked up a rifle, and standing a little to one side of the door, out of line of fire, jabbed the muzzle into the hole and fired, again and again; but even as he shot, over his shoulder he was watching the windows. Sudden curses, full of pain, within

the bunkroom indicated that somebody had been hit.

Mrs. Allen crawled along the bunk and huddled down in a corner of the thick walls, and there she moaned, clinging to Jane, holding her half protectively, and half as if to be protected.

"Nora"—Buck spoke rapidly—"take them straps there, off that valise. Tie Red up—it 'll make it look better for him to be tied up!"

Buck, peering from a window was shot at, narrowly missed, and with amazing swiftness shot in return, pausing just an instant after he pulled the trigger.

"Got 'im!" said Buck, grinning savagely. "I like to *see* 'em drop!"

Nora, crouching low, with bullets striking overhead and about her, got the straps and tied as best she could, hurriedly, Red's hands and feet.

Buck, crouching low, his eyes on the windows, prodded more by feeling than sight the empty shells from his revolvers and loaded them.

Nora staggered back, clapping a hand to her arm.

"Girl, did they get *you?*" Buck shouted, coming to her.

"It ain't nothing!"

Buck cursed:

"Such —— men! I can't stand this—they'll get me anyhow—I'll go out an'—"

"No you won't!" she cried savagely. "They shot me— I'll *fight!*"

Her dark eyes glowed with downright madness. She tossed the hair from her face, seized a rifle, dropped to her knees and emptied it into the bunkroom door. Smoke filled the room. Buck pawed it from before his eyes. The fumes of burned powder made all of them at times cough.

"Stop it!" said Buck, catching Nora's shoulder. "Get in a corner! I've got to get you women out!"

He went near the door, and standing well to one side, called and pounded, but no one answered him; perhaps they could not hear in the bunkroom, for men there were pouring shots into the door as if to shatter more holes, bigger holes.

"I can't stand this!" he said again, peering through the smoke at Mrs. Allen, terrified, weeping, at Jane, wide-eyed with fright, at Nora, now kneeling in the corner, a rifle against her shoulder as she bent down, examining her arm, dabbling her fingers in the blood, examining the wound. "It's my last fight anyhow," said Buck to himself.

The smoke-filled room gave him one advantage: he could see the windows better than any one could see in, and he could have sat in a corner and escaped being hit perhaps for a long time. Men had got to the front door too and were trying to shoot through. Bullets were coming from many directions, but mostly they struck high. It seemed that he was charmed against them; they went by him, they cut his shirt, they struck the wall an inch from his head, but not one had drawn his blood.

Jane cried out with sudden pain and fear: a bullet had torn her hair, yanking her head, embedding shreds of her hair into the wall. No corner of the room was now really protected.

"Nora—you—get over here!"

He went to her, pulled her, helped her, half forced her into the more safe position just opposite to where Mrs. Allen and Jane were huddled.

"Now you stay there!"

Then Buck replaced the empty shells in his revolver. He worked quickly, he moved rapidly. He went to the side of Nora.

"Girl, I wisht I'd knowed you better when you come—we would 'a' gone, me proud to have you. But they 've got me now. They 'll get you women too if—they 're goin' know they's been a fight!"

Buck had three loaded revolvers; his two and Red's. He thrust one down into his waistband, another butt-outward under his left arm, and held the third in his right hand. Before Nora knew what he was about he threw up the bar across the door, swung it open and leaped into the bunkroom, fanning the hammer as he went.

Nora screamed. Men yelled in surprize, and two men dropped dead when Buck had shot three times, and the third spun and fell writhing. But the charm that seemed to have protected him from bullets as long as he remained in the little room with the women was broken the instant he crossed the threshold. Men with guns out who were shooting at the door shot at him from every angle and could not miss. But so rapid was his shooting that one of his revolvers had clicked on an empty shell before he sank to his knees, hit in the neck, stomach and legs; and there, as if sustained by the unearthly energy of a Malay amok, he

emptied the second gun, and had actually fired twice from the third when a bullet dead center into his forehead knocked him down with the back blown out of his head.

There had been eight men in the room, and his rapid aim was so accurate that five were dead or dying, some twice hit; the other three had been struck, and but one was on his feet, the Sheriff Aquillar.

It had begun and ended in hardly more than a dozen seconds. As Aquillar peered through the smoke, crouching low, gun in hand, he hardly knew what had happened, but had the impression that two or three men had come out of that room. There had been flashes and gun roars for a few wild moments, then within the room sudden silence except for the groans and curses of those that were dying.

As Aquillar moved forward, staring in his dull sober way, he became aware of a numb sensation in his leg, and rubbed a hand down below his hip absently, feeling the blood before realizing that he too had been hit. His was a slow brain, full of courage but a little dull. He walked up slowly to where Buck lay and looked about over the floor, incredulously, trying to see the other two or three men who had seemed to come shooting through that door. Then Aquillar said aloud, respectfully:

"*Por Dios!* Señor, you were a man!"

Outside men were still firing through the windows and door, beating the walls with their bullets, to keep the outlaw down, to make him uneasy, to break his nerve, show him he had no chance, to make him willing to crawl out and give himself up when the firing paused and he had a chance to surrender.

Men came in and looked wonderingly. There were bad men among them, which is to say good men with a gun, and they cursed under their breath admiringly as they looked about and heard what Aquillar told and what the other two wounded men said. There were men among them who had not fired a shot at the room, because they believed women were there; and other men who had shot because they did not believe women were there, and some who had not cared who were in the room.

Said one of the wounded men—

"He shot faster than any two men you ever saw—the air it was plumb full o' lead, like he was *pourin'* 'er out!"

Said the other: "He jus' jumped out an' started shootin'. An' it was like we couldn't hit 'im! By —— he seemed to be *grinnin'* at us! I was jus' pullin' the trigger as hard as I could, puttin' all my weight behind ever' bullet—jus' tryin' to knock him over. It was like we couldn't hit him, I tell you. Another shot an' he'd a-had ever' man of us down!"

Word had come into Perez by wire that one of the wounded men of the Harrison gang, caught while trying to rob a train up in Colorado, near La Junta, had told—evidently revengefully because the old outlaw had refused to lead them on this last job—that Harrison's real name was Boyd, and that he and young Buck were now down in the San Arnaz Basin, trying to steal a ranch by pretending to be heirs.

The scattered newspapers about Perez, the finding of the real La Rue, made men understand at once who Buck really was; that, and the way he had shown he could draw and shoot.

A friend had ridden wildly to Cunningham, bearing the news, while in town Aquillar went about gathering a posse. Cunningham's men had reached the Eighty-Eight first, and had approached the ranch house in a wide circle so as to cut off any attempt Buck might make to ride off; and these men had planned to sneak up close enough to surprize and shoot down the men there. They had expected to find more than two men.

III

CUNNINGHAM had been outside the house, safely placed at an angle of the wall, and he came in bulkily, waddling, puffing. His hairy face seemed fairly to bristle with a kind of wrathful triumph, and he pushed his broad hat to the back of his head, stood above the dead outlaw and cursed him.

"Aw stop it, Monk!" said one of his own men, a young rat-faced killer who for the color of gold would shoot men in the back. "Stop it, you ——! You cuss him like that now, but you wouldn't git in a mile o' him, alone, if he wasn't dead!"

Cunningham turned and glowered—

"See here, Tug Rainey, you ain't goin' talk to me that away!"

But the rat-faced killer glared sullenly, answering:

"You heard me! An' case you didn't, I'll repeat 'er, you big ——!"

Then Tug Rainey, who was respected by no one except in so far as he would shoot, and when he did, it was likely to be in the back, rolled a cigaret; and as nothing more was said to him, he walked over to one side of the room and leaned against the wall, as much surprized at himself as others were surprized at his having paid tribute to one whom he knew had been a better man than himself.

Cunningham still claimed the ranch on the grounds that the real heir had sold it to him, and as the "real" heir was dead—there in Perez old Hendryx had emptied a double-barrelled shot gun into his back, and some of the shot had struck the Marshal, too, injuring him rather badly—Cunningham meant that his bill of sale should stand, though it was in fragments and some of the pieces were missing.

He now said to the face of the worn and sickened Mrs. Allen, and to Jane, who caressingly supported her mother, what he had repeatedly said to his men:

"You women were in with him, knew all along who he was. You didn't want to leave that room—you was given a chanct. I bet you was loadin' guns for him, wasn't yuh?"

Nora, dark eyed, with hair in wild tangles about her face and shoulders, her face streaked with powder grime, her fingers covered with blood, and her arm now aching from the bullet wound, answered savagely:

"You lie! 'Twas *me* loaded his guns an' I shot 'em too! An' if I'd a had a chance I'd shot you—!"

"There, see! What 'd I tell you boys? She admits it!" said Cunningham, holding out his broad palm and moving it about as if showing there the evidence he claimed. "An' these here women—" he frowned upon Mrs. Allen—"claimin' to be relation to ol' La Rue—'tain't so, I bet! They was in with that Harrison feller all along for to steal the ranch!"

Men were carrying in Red Clark. His hands were strapped, his feet were tied, there was a bloody bump on his head, and, though no longer unconscious, he was dazed, his head ached, his mouth seemed swollen, parched. He did not know what had happened or was happening.

"Why, what's the matter with him? How'd he get tied up that away?" men asked.

Cunningham, always brutal, said:

"He's one o' the gang. If he ain't dead, we'll hang 'im!"

Nora's answer was violent with oaths, and she mingled truth with lies, crying:

"He never knew Buck was Buck Harrison till he heard Aquillar there say so. But because him an' Buck had been friends, Red was willin' to fight it out! But Buck wouldn't have it! He knocked Red down an' tied him up. That's the truth. Ain't it? Ain't it?" she demanded of Jane.

And Jane, not speaking, nodded.

"We'll tend to him awright," said Cunningham, then he cleared his throat, pulled his hat forward, frowned and spoke:

"These here women—" he indicated Jane and her mother—"have got to git to town an' out the country. You 've got no rights here an'—"

"What you going to do with me?" Nora shouted at him. "I 'm not going to leave the country till I am —— good and ready. It was *me* that got Buck to get out that paper, and told him things about you an' Barley. I knew all along he was Buck Harrison. I loaded his guns an' shot 'em! What you going to do to me?"

"We'll turn you over to the 'thorities," said Cunningham angrily, then went over to where Aquillar was sitting, examining his leg. But as Cunningham went, Nora answered him with scornful profanity; it was not only that she had no fear, it was simply that she did not care.

Mrs. Allen sat on a bunk, huddled over, her hand against her mouth to keep from moaning. She could not think or speak; she merely suffered. Her ears still seemed numbed by the crash of guns, and it was all as paralyzing as a nightmare, as unreal in sensation when she tried to realize what had happened.

It was Nora who talked and with a flaming scorn of these men and pride in Buck:

"—you never would have got him out but for us fool women staying in there with him. He was afraid you woman-shooters—" with her right hand she held up her left arm, showing them where she had been hit—"would kill us. That's why he came out at you!"

Some one had taken the straps off Red and he sat up dizzily, looking about him.

"What's—what's happened?" he asked, holding his aching head, looking with a kind of blear-eyed doubt at the men. "I been shot in the head, feels like."

"You just lay back there an' don't talk," said Nora, pushing at him, but Red would not lie back.

"Did they get Buck?" he asked.

"Yeah, we got him awright," said a man.

"You got him!" Nora answered. "*You* got him, did you? You ——!"

The man uncomfortably moved away; and Cunningham returned toward them, not pleased. He had told Aquillar to take these women, all of them, to town; the mother and daughter were to be put on the train, Nora in jail. Aquillar refused; before he would dispossess Mrs. Allen he would have to have a court order.

"I'll do it myself," said Cunningham.

So he returned to Mrs. Allen and said:

"You women are goin' to light out, now. My boys 'll take you to town." He looked toward Red. "You 've come to, huhn? Well you 're goin' to have a trial in about twenty minutes an' get hung. I'm runnin' this here country from now on."

"Go to ——," said Red wearily, "I don't care none."

"You done just as much shootin' as Buck Harrison hisself, I bet an'—"

"Yo're right I did!" Red answered with a flare of anger, answering before Nora could check him.

"Unh-huhn so!" Cunningham grunted, tauntingly. He savagely grabbed Red's shoulder, and as Nora struggled to pull away his hand, he struck her with a heavy backward swing of arm, saying loudly to Red: "You 're goin' be hung!"

Nora stumbled backward and her foot turned on something. She glanced down at what had nearly tripped her, then looked quickly about and saw that she was not watched. She sank down, not stooping, but went down on one knee, covering the gun on the floor with her skirt, and groped for it under her skirt. Then she grasped it, cocked it, straightened up and fired.

Cunningham with a hoarse yell half threw up his arms and tried to turn, but fell, toppling over, dead.

Nora faced the men with wild-eyed scorn, tossing the gun away, one that had fallen from the hand of some man that Buck had killed and lay unnoticed until her foot turned on it. She brushed with the back of her hand at the tangle of hair before her face and spoke, trying to speak calmly, but her voice rose hysterically:

"I'd have done it—if it took me ten years, I'd have done it. But now it's done an' I don't care what—don't care what yuh do to me!"

IV

IT WAS just about at this same minute that men outside of the house caught sight of horsemen approaching the ranch; but they gazed at them indifferently, with hardly more than idle curiosity, for word had got about that Harrison, the outlaw, was at the Eighty-Eight, and men were likely to be riding in from all directions.

As these horsemen rode nearer—and seeing so many men and horses about the ranchhouse they had quickened their pace and came at a furious gallop—Jake Spencer was recognized in the lead; near him a big man on a big gray horse that was soon made out to be Pop Murdock.

"Hammarsmith 's been cleaned up for them to come," said some one.

"Never had a chanct agin Spencer's crowd," said another. "Got too many friends, Jake has."

Then another figure, galloping madly, was identified with some distrust as Blade Jones. Aquillar had been helped outside the house, leaning on the shoulders of two men; and some one asked:

"You, Sher'ff, ain't you got a warrant f'r him?"

Aquillar, slow of thought, looked at the man who had spoken, and answered:

"It' in Perez. I have no warrant with me."

Men glanced sidewise at one another, half grinning. Aquillar's viewpoint was one way out of a bad hole, for any attempt to arrest the wild-headed Blade Jones among such friends as these, particularly on the part of a Mexican sheriff, would have led to the need of a new sheriff.

There were a dozen men riding in with Spencer, and most of them were easily recognized, well known, but there was one unfamiliar figure among them, though as he came near it seemed to Aquillar that he had seen this man before for his face was the color of leather, and stamped with wrinkles, and the look in his eyes was one that caused men to remember him. Boyd, as he came on, pulled the Winchester from his scabbard and held it at arm's length down at his side.

Spencer's horse, with head tossed high

and legs stiffly braced, stopped abruptly with a few sliding stiff-legged hops, near the ranch house and close to Aquillar; and Boyd was by Spencer's side, looking hard at Aquillar.

Aquillar was now the only one present who had been in the bar room of the hotel when La Rue was killed; and slow of thought though he was, and being pounded now with questions from Jake Spencer, nevertheless in his slow blurred way, he realized that this Boyd must be the elder Harrison; but he also realized that this Harrison held a Winchester at his side and meant to shoot at the first flicker of trouble.

"What's been goin' on here!" Spencer snapped.

Men answered him; and among them certain men spoke up who had objected to firing on the room while the women were there, and others who spoke in frank admiration of the fight that Buck Harrison had made. And other of Spencer's men, having ridden in close, were demanding in voices keyed to menace just what had been going on; and men were answering them.

Aquillar spoke up to Spencer; but Aquillar was not such a duty-mad officer of the law as to get himself shot then and there by that Winchester. He said—

"We learned that the man here who called himself La Rue was the young Harrison outlaw an'—"

"An' you 've killed him?" Spencer shouted angrily, as if the killing of an outlaw by a sheriff was an outrage.

"Señor, not until he had killed many. I too was shot!"

"Cunnin'ham here? These are his men, most of 'em."

"Dead, señor. The woman shot him."

"What woman?"

"Of Barley's saloon. The woman Nora."

Spencer swore in astonishment, jumped from his horse, made for the door, and men stepped aside to let him go. Others of Spencer's men dismounted and followed; some stayed in their saddles, and among these was Boyd, who faced the sheriff, watching him with a kind of stern calmness.

Near by Pop Murdock, who saw and understood what was going on in silence between the sheriff and Boyd, got down with a slow cumbersome movement from the saddle, shook himself, straightened his clothing, and came up to Aquillar.

"Sher'ff," said Murdock blandly, indicating Boyd with a slight movement of arm, "this here is a friend o' mine—knowed him down on the Border, years ago—"

"Me an' the sheriff met once before I b'lieve," said Boyd, just that and nothing more; and knowing the sheriff was to be taken care of, he dismounted and hurriedly entered the house.

"My leg," said Aquillar to Murdock, "it is like a dead man's, señor, except that it hurts. I cannot stand longer."

"Le' 's set down over here on the bench," said Murdock, pointing, an' have a word, jus' you an' me, alone."

Aquillar was helped to the bench. His leg was stiff, swollen, painful. He sat down, and Murdock, with deliberation, sat down beside him; and speaking to such men as stood by to listen said:

"Me an' the sher'ff have a little business, private."

Spencer's men, though few of numbers, were on edge, half expecting trouble, half wanting it, for they were fresh from having won a range war, and were at heart arrogantly ready for another. The Hammarsmiths had seized two waterholes and been chased away from both; Cliff Hammarsmith had been killed, and the elder Hammarsmith, at the end of a running fight, had his horse shot from under him, then with up-raised arms gave himself up, asking only for life.

Among the men at the ranch house were many who were not off Cunningham's range, men that had rode out in Aquillar's posse, men who had a greater respect for Spencer than they had ever had for Cunningham; and these had no particular feeling of pride, in fact were touched with a kind of shame, at having been mixed up in a fight in which women had been hit.

Inside the house Spencer had faced Jane and her mother, saying:

"You be Mrs. Allen? Me, I'm Jake Spencer, yore neighbor. An' you ain't goin' to have no more trouble with neighbors—north, south, or any other direction. I'll see to that. This here is mostly why I come over—"

He pulled from his inside vest pocket a sweat-discolored letter, written in pencil, and held it out abruptly, with a kind of thrusting gesture toward the dazed woman.

Jane took it, opened it with slow wonderment, and read, at first not understanding; then she said to her mother:

"This is a letter Buck wrote to Mr. Spencer." Jane read aloud: "—the feeling is getting bigger and bigger in me that I ain't no right to this here ranch, so if you will help me a little to get things straightened out I promise to get out of the country and take nothing—" As she read, Jane's voice broke, her eyes became blurred, tears dropped. She crumpled the letter, throwing her arm up before her eyes, and leaning against her mother wept in pity for the outlaw, one who had been known throughout the country as a born killer.

Nora, all this while, like the chorus of an ancient tragedy, with voice high-pitched and herself looking half-mad, told to Spencer's men and to the man Boyd, of the fight, of how Buck had tried to keep Red from being blamed, of how Buck had come out of the room because he feared the women would be killed—she raised her left arm, holding it out for them to see.

What Spencer said was enough to have made less spirited men than Cunningham's riders fight, but they did not. He cursed them and they took it. It was not so much the fact that he and his men stood now ready to shoot at less than the drop of a hat, but it was the downright honesty of his heart and courage. Small of body and fierce-eyed, he had a dominance that baffled and frustrated the mere physical bravery of other men.

"—Cunnin'ham was after this ranch, to steal 'er, more than after Buck Harrison. An' you men knowed it! Now climb yore hosses an' be a-ridin', an' let never a man o' you set hoof on this range agin! By—— into yore saddles an' go!"

They glowered at him and seemed to move their feet as if to brace themselves and not budge, but the very shuffling of their feet unwillingly carried them backward a step or two, and when they glanced with furtive inquiry from one to another, there was no leadership among them, no one to stand out and answer him. Besides there were the men who had come out with Aquillar, and the attitude of these seemed sternly to approve of what Spencer said and meant.

The fellows thus ordered off did not break and run for their saddles, but went with surly slowness, as if showing that they went because they wanted to go, not because they were told. But they went. They mounted. They rode off in groups, riding slowly to prove that they did not go out of fear, and they told one another what they meant to do when they again met with Jake Spencer, and no one believed the other though all said much the same thing.

V

SAID Pop Murdock to Jack Boyd, alias Harrison, leader and lone survivor of the famous outlaw gang, as they stood apart outside of the house, and the old outlaw's stamped-leather face showed nothing of what he felt or thought except perhaps in that the stamping iron had struck deeper lines into his thin mouth and along the high cheeks:

"Me an' Aquillar, who ain't a bad feller, though he ain't much good, have had a long talk. Unh-hunhn. I'm gettin' too old an' fat for a saddle any more I reckon, so I'm drivin' home in a buckboard, takin' the sher'ff whose leg is plumb painful. I'm quite some saddle-sore a-ready for a man as onct lived hoss-back. Gettin' old an' useless, I reckon.

"Aquillar he allows as how he ain't goin' say nothin' much about some things as he knows. Yeah. He's used to doin' things like keepin' still for his friends—like me an' him is now. Gittin' down so low as ridin' in a buckboard, I might as well go the res' o' the way an' monkey some with politics. An' I was jus' tellin' Aquillar as how I've got the feelin' strong that Jim Barley is goin' leave town all in a hurry—an' stay; that is less he likes Perez well 'nough to want to be buried there. Unh-huhn.

"Aquillar, he likes the weight of a badge on his vest, an' if I name the deputies, I reckon him bein' 'lected sher'ff agin won't do no harm, much. We're takin' the girl Nora in with us. Unh-huhn. An' jus' for the satisfaction of havin' a jury give her some public thanks for shootin' Monk Cunnin'ham, I reckon there may be a little trial. Me, runnin' politics from now on, an' the sher'ff pickin' the jury, she'll get quite some strong thanks. Anyhow, Cunnin'ham was allus a mighty unpop'lar man among folks that dared to speak up and say what they thought, an' him bein' dead, ever'body 'll be chuck full o' darin' to speak up. Yeah.

"Queer an' mighty funny how things they work out," Murdock went on slowly,

gazing off into space. "When we rode in an' found you there to Spencer's ranch house this mornin'—if we'd a-come right along over here we'd a-got here in time I reckon to maybe be some help to Buck. But women is queer, an' you saw how Miz Spencer she was plumb eager for to cook us a big meal all by herself just to sort-a celebrate Jake's home-comin'. You could see how she was sort-a flustered an' eager-like, so we waited an' et it as if it was as good as Jake hisself 'peared honestly to think. Yeah, it *is* mighty queer how things they work out.

"Yo're ridin' North, you said. Away North. She'll be the lonesomest trail of all the trailin' you 've ever done alone, I reckon. It's mighty hard for us fellers as ain't never had no son to say anything sens'ble to them as has lost a boy, but Buck he was a mighty up-standin' feller, some ways. Few boys ever went out in a way more commandin' of respect. Some women they're mighty worthless I reckon; but somehow the feller as stand up for 'em, even for them as is worthless, is allus a man. It shore is *mighty* queer how things work out."

BY WAY OF A POSTSCRIPT

ONE day a few weeks later Red Clark, still top-hand for the Eighty-Eight though it was now being supervised by Jake Spencer, was loafing on the depot platform watching the train pull in.

Among the few passengers that got off was a middle-aged man in city clothes who looked about uncertainly, then approached Red, inquired the way to a hotel, and asked if Red happened to know anything about the Eighty-Eight ranch.

"I reckon," said Red, eying him suspiciously, for though Jim Barley had left the country in something of a hurry and the court had seen fit to appoint one Sam Murdock as administrator, there was a good deal of trouble about settling up the estate. The story of the La Rue ranch had got into Eastern newspapers, and there seemed to be all sorts of people, claiming more or less close relationship to the man who had called himself George La Rue.

"Could *you* take me out to the ranch?" the gentleman inquired.

"You one o' them city lawyers?" demanded Red.

"No, not at all," said the gentleman somewhat surprized.

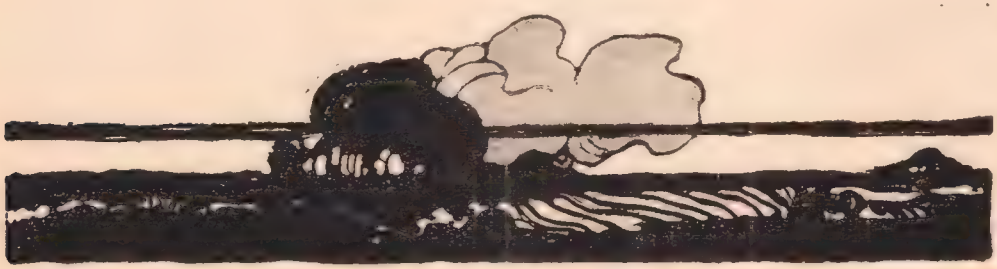
"Me, I'm Red Clark o' the Eighty-Eight. I'd admire for to hear what you want?"

"Oh well, you're being connected with the ranch—that is different. I was formerly connected with a bank in Denver. At one time, some years ago, we had considerable dealing with George La Rue. One day when he was in Denver he gave me an envelop, asking that I personally take charge of it, said that it was his will, that he was afraid to entrust it with any one in Perez, because papers had a way of getting lost and being destroyed. I retired from the bank and took a trip to Europe, and had completely forgotten about the La Rue will until on my return I saw an account in the papers of the trouble you have been having down here. I felt the best thing I could do was to come in person and—"

Red had him by the arm and was pulling hard as he stumped off with spurs clattering, and dragging the man along.

"Yo're wanted, bad, right over here to Pop Murdock's place. He's 'ministrator now, Pop is. All that's happened wrong hereabouts has been yore fault an' if I wasn't so glad for to see you, we'd have an argyment. But I shore hope you didn't git no pleasure outta yore trip to Eur'pe!"

THE END



Author of "Swallowtail," "Gray Ghost," etc.

NOBODY seems to know quite why Nature appears to take a delight in making things so beastly uncomfortable for her people—man and the wild creatures alike. She does, however, and the marvel, the lasting marvel is that some of us contrive to be happy under her tyranny—man by fits and starts, the wild folk frankly. And, as a rule, Tengmalmi was a case in point.

Tengmalmi had a face like a judge of advanced age in a rowdy court—about one-third head and two-thirds body, both round. Except for the extreme fluffiness of his plumage, which stood out as if on end, he might easily have been mistaken for that precise owl associated in classical literature with the goddess Pallas Athene. They were about of a size—eight and a half inches or thereabouts. But his lot was cast in different and less sunny places; and he belonged by name to some one very far removed from any goddess. A certain Mr. Tengmalm had discovered him, or rather Mr. Tengmalm, who was by way of being a naturalist, discovered his greatity-great-great grandfather. The name—and fame—had descended hereditarilly and scientifically to him. Exactly. There are some lucky people who know what it feels like to be "discovered"; they will be able to understand our owl's outlook on life. The author is not one of them. Nor does it matter, for what does matter is the bird's outlook upon life at the precise psychological moment at which we choose to look in upon his career.

The owl's—Tengmalm's owl, remember, though he did not seem to know it—outlook at that moment was upon a waste. People in England do not know what a waste is. Picture, however, if you can, an ocean blinding white and petrified. That's it—petrified, undulating, limitless, dead. Petrified sound. Petrified life. Petrified everything. Only the waste was land, not sea, and the white was snow. About the first place Nature made, and tried to forget about ever after—it was so bad.

Tengmalm's owl sat on the last fir-tree in the last fir-forest in Europe, walking north toward where the Stars and Stripes float from the North Pole. And his view—his utterly bored expression showed it—was that this land, Russia, to wit, had been grossly overdone and overdrawn as an abode for anything more lively than marble statues. Also he guessed it was about time to step off; which was no matter for surprize, seeing that no food had passed his hookey beak for a day and a half or seemed in the remotest chance likely to for the next hundred days and a half if he stayed in that place accursed of God and man alike.

The step, however, that our friend Tengmalmi contemplated was a mighty big one, many hundreds of miles, if we admit the truth; and he who proposed to take it was, as we have said, some eight and a half inches more or less. It was enough to stagger humanity, that step, but it did not stagger Tengmalmi, a fact which, it seems to us, really gave him more claim to fame than the chance that he or his remote ancestor was one fine day discovered—which is sure to mean shot—by some scientific gentleman.

Then, in the pale of the evening, he took the step, shaking out in the process a bit of a surprize in the wing line—very long for the size of the bird and, though rounded, evidently made with the idea of flight power beyond the ordinary.

Tangmalmi had thought he was alone, that every wild folk who could fly had fled the winter wrath to come and those who could not had gone under the snow to sleep it out. The white of the endless snow, however, had dyed the coats of many, touching them thus with the magic wand of invisibility. Tengmalmi, once in the open—which he hated—showed up unhealthily in his muffled coat of brown upperworks, mottled with white bars except on the head where the bars became spots, and gray beneath, mottled with clove.

His enlightenment came when an ermine, white as the snow he was mixed up with, dropped from the branch above to the precise spot the owl had vacated one twenty-fifth of a second after he had vacated it. That was a near enough shave, in all conscience, and made Tengmalmi whistle soft and eerily at the thought of what those keen canine teeth might have done. But the whistle was switched off, and became a hiss, cat fashion, of horror as a white and padded apparition cut sheer from over the spiked ranked tree tops to snow, exactly one-eighth of an inch behind the distinguished five interrupted white bars of Tengmalmi's short tail.

Tengmalmi gave up hope, but flew on, hugging the ground. He knew that the white ghost had turned by then, as it backed off behind into twenty-six inches of concentrated cat-like ferocity, stealth and strength incarnate, all wrapped up in swathe upon swathe of white feathers, even to the talons, till all sense of real bird inside was lost, and one wondered how this, the giant snowy owl, the great white terror of the dread arctic night, could fly at all. He wondered also why the ogre of the sheeted silence had not followed him, but the ermine did not. Owl does not prey upon owl, as a rule, though they may resent them and their presence, but snowy owl preys upon ermine when it can catch that same moving, therefore visible.

AFTER that Tengmalmi's own land became even more distasteful to him than before and, like a certain other famous person, he tried to "quit that country by the sea." But there is one thing harder than getting into Russia, and that is getting out of her.

Omitting a lot of aeronautical detail which concerned only the birds and aeronauts, Tengmalmi picked up an obliging easterly slant of wind at the three hundred foot level and, "making westing," he flew and he flew and he flew. After that he was still flying, and at the end of that time he really began to fly.

Above him, a lead lid by day and a blue-black velvet one by night, was a sky that seemed everlastingly to press down and down and down.

Beneath was white, blinding, aching, terrifying, faithless snow. And the snow was in lairs, forest and plain, once now and again in long leagues with the crawling speck of man or disturbed bear upon it. And sometimes the forest was a hundred miles across, and sometimes the plain was; and sometimes the man was up on his hindlegs, and sometimes the bear was.

Not being mechanical, Tengmalmi, at long intervals, had to rest. A book could be written about those rests alone. He sought cover, and times he slept in peace; and once he awoke to find an arctic fox, white as driven snow, jumping up and snapping at him to within half an inch; and once his slumbers ended in a mighty crack and a roar as the big bough he was on collapsed beneath its intolerable burden of snow; and once a sable, with a really wonderful aerial dive from a neighboring tree, tried to make him wake up in the next world, but he flung himself backwards off his perch, and preferred, though he felt the fangs, sharp as rapiers, rip through his fluffed out feathers —a peculiarity of his, you will remember— to remain awake in this one.

A white and tumbled desolation, which may have been Sweden or Norway or both, succeeded, without interruption, to Russia and finally—the sea. I do not know which looked coldest—land with snow or sea without. Both, by any standards, were terrible. Just so, you know what that means. And Tengmalmi, after one long rest, partly wasted in a beary fight with an aged lemming—who is like the field vole of our land, much magnified, plus the temper of Eblis, who simply would not die and be eaten—Tengmalmi literally jumped off the map of continental Europe, and was gone.

After that came a gap. From the time that Tengmalmi kicked the land of his birth behind him till the time that he made land again, I do not know what happened, and you would not believe me if I did. All we feel sure of is that Tengmalmi flew; he must have flown or he would have been drowned. He could not have fed. We may safely presume he did not sleep. Resting or leaning were out of the question, and there was nothing to drink. The cold was a cold that froze icicles on your mustasche as you breathed, and if you had fallen into the water, it would probably have stopped the action of your heart. We know there were blinding snow showers hurrying hither and yon, and over the awful stretch a mad blizzard; and Tengmalmi was only about eight and a half inches long, that was all. Picture him out there in the perishing, restless night over the endless desert of waves without a compass, without chart, foodless, alone, without anything, in short, but the stout little heart God had given him and the will to dare.

The next that was known of Tengmalmi was—very, very many cold hours afterward—the vision of a tired little, soaked little—that is the worst of very fluffy plumage—bird, flying as if every beat would be his last, and the hungry gnashing waves only an inch or two below his up-drawn hooked claws would have him in the end; flying, I say, in the midst of a vast mob of all the skylarks you ever saw and a hurrying, scurrying cloud of snow; flying into the great blazing, staring, inquisitive eye of one of England's lighthouses.

In from the sea they came drifting, that amazing conglomerate fog of larks and one little miniature model of an owl, almost hidden in the mist of whirling feathers and flakes.

He vanished in the black lake of shadow beneath the beams, above where the ghostly surf mist shone around the rocks, and then—but how he got there I never could tell—appeared, all at once, seated upon the rail that ran around the glass of the light.

Cut fine as a blot of ink upon white blotting paper, you see the bird, his back turned to that intolerable glare, looking out with his eyes shut, for all I know, seaward. And all around him, as they were silver confetti or enormously magnified snow-flakes, floating and drifted, fluttered and wavered, hovered, sank, rose, passed, repassed and passed again hundred upon hundreds of dazed, blinded, tired, numbed, helpless skylarks. Talk about moths around a lamp! The poor little wretches beat against the glass, settled on the rails, carpeted the balcony inches deep, covered the rocks below in all accessible and inaccessible places, crowded the landing stage and floated, in every stage of slow drowning, upon the tossing heave of the cruel bosom of the sea beneath. It was a wreck of the skylarks in very truth, a debacle. And all had come from whence Tengmalmi himself had come; all were travelers, emigrants, refugees, and this—this, my friends, was the end of their journey. For many it was the end of life also.

These things, however, did not matter to the owl. He was spared the fascination of the light, for his eyes, being very large and round and expressly designed for quite other and very opposite purposes, could not face the glare at all; it hurt abominably. Moreover, he was asleep.

But it is a poor thing to sleep in fifteen or twenty degrees of frost with nothing at all inside of you. The blood, if it is to defy the cold, expects food to keep it warm. This was why we discover the owl, one hour later, thoroughly woke up and very purposefully murdering a luckless skylark, one of the heaps of luckless skylarks lying all around. The skylark scarcely protested. He would have died anyway.

Tengmalmi, thereafter, held his prey up in his right claw as was his invariable custom, standing on the left—a small point except that the conventional pictures do not agree with it. He carved swiftly and professionally with his fish-hook of a beak, fed swiftly and as swiftly was asleep. Only the wings and the tail of the skylark beside him remained to prove the deed.

DAWN'S wan pale face shut off the one intolerable light only to introduce another. And Tengmalmi, waking, blinked cold disapproval; for he hated light.

Dawn brought also human voices and a sea-booted leg coming out on to the balcony, and Tengmalmi waited for no more. He fled to the glaring white shore, accompanied instantly by two lesser black-backed gulls, who seemed to think that he was a skylark about to die and be swallowed whole. In his own way, which was cat-like and sulfurious, the owl swiftly and pointedly—claws, beak and all—disillusioned them. But famine and death stalked openly over the face of the wild that he came to, and England's welcome to the little fellow as he landed was a foul-beaked, rogue-eyed spectral silhouette in black and gray who sailed under many names, all bad—gray crow or brother of the devil or any other, it did not matter which. Tengmalmi had met him before they were ever refugees and had devoutly hoped never to meet him again.

The interview took place on the streeted sand-dunes—they looked like a tumbled bed—and, beginning with a drunken "You can't! You can't! You can't!" on the part of the crow and an odd mewing, sucking sound on the part of Tengmalmi, ended with the latter upon his back, clutching and snapping, a literal hedgehog of spikes, but ten times more dangerous. Still he did look so small, far too small for an owl; and the crow risked a jab with the tomahawk he called his beak. Then he wished he had not. He was quite one minute shaking Tengmalmi off his face, but considerably less than one second in skipping out of the little terror's reach.

Tangmalmi removed, after that, inland, looking for cover, since cover he must have, must. His temperament craved it. There was no cover, however, only snow, level, blinding, still. Even the fields had vanished, and all was one white plain over which birds, disconsolate and desperate, fluttered, flew, flapped, and flopped as their numbed fancies prompted.

Half blind with the glare, more than half frozen, the minature owl flapped slowly on, buffeted from time to time by such of the smaller feathered ones as had heart enough left—robins more especially—and saw herein a chance of getting their own back; buffeted by the unspeakable wind; buffeted by—oh, hooked beaks and curved talons! Three jackdaws rising up from a dead or dying—it did not matter which to them—ewe.

A somewhat extensive experience of mobbing—every bird seems to mob an owl as a matter of course—had taught Tengmalmi that the funny prankish little monk with the grey cowl is apt to cease being funny in snow time and to become frankly barbarian. Besides, there were three of them, each fourteen inches in length and each provided with a beak which did not always only dig for corn.

There is no joy at all in having one feather of your very short tail pulled out by one rude beak; and directly you turn on its owner—who, of course, is not there—receiving a dig in the armpit from a second that doubles you up in the act of flight; and, upon retaliation, finding another investigating your head with a view to discovering if your brains are really as big and wise as you look.

Tengmalmi, snapping his beak, and all on end like a chivied cat, fled blindly and wildly all across that snow-muffled countryside, seeking for the cover he could not find, dodging and tumbling like a tumbler pigeon, followed by his black torturers.

Nowhere could he see cover; not a decent-sized bush even; nothing—nothing but snow and a few naked trees; no living, breathing thing, but—ah! Thank the good god Pan!

A black ant was crawling painfully over the earth's white shroud, followed by a black flea. Nearer investigation enlarged them into a gun, a man and a retriever dog.

Now there was nothing in his past knowledge to alienate Tengmalmi from man in the sense in which many of our own birds have become to. The lord of creation where Tengmalmi came from was few and far between. Neither Nature nor his brethren encouraged his increase; and when met at all, he had other uses for his powder and shot than the slaying of owlets no bigger than a thrush. Result—Tengmalmi made straight for the man.

The jackdaws, filled with disgust, turned and went, suddenly and precisely, at fifty yards distance, which is extreme twelve-bore gun range.

Tengmalmi broke aside and settled among what looked like a photograph in miniature of the Alps in winter, which was really a

snow-covered furze brake; and the dog, as the man walked forward, came and flushed him up out of it, ignominiously as any partridge.

The brooding silence of the scene was torn and rent by the shattering, short report; a sword-blade of flame licked out and back, and Tengmalmi sank upon the snow again as noiselessly, ghostly and softly as he had risen from it. Also he coughed, and the cough was human and lugubrious.

The black retriever, who had a reputation for a tender mouth to keep going, picked Tengmalmi up very gently and slowly to carry him to his waiting master. Then the black retriever put him down again, not slowly and rather less gently. It was like picking up an animated powder puff studded with fish-hooks.

The little owl upon his back, snapping his beak audibly, gripping his mittened talons, blazing fire from his big round eyes, saw the great dog standing over him dimly; saw, too, the man come up and tower high as St. Pauls; heard, as it was very far away and receding, a mighty voice booming; then heard and saw and knew no more.

VOICES, warmth and a hard, smooth bed. And again voices very near. The black fog was receding slowly, and a great light flooded in.

Tengmalmi opened one eye warily—it might show so much. He all but shut it again, for he beheld the day, and the day hurt. But he beheld other things as well. Faces, several and human, pressed about him. There was no sky, except outside a square aperture, and smoke filled the air. Also—but how was he to know about fires? —summer had apparently come back.

These things so annoyed the little owl that he opened both eyes a little way to see what manner of strange earth he was lying upon, and he cracked, or snapped if you like, his hooked beak like an old and toothless man mumbling. He was, as a matter of fact, lying on his back upon a dining-room table, and four men were, with interest, regarding him.

"Tengmalmi's owl," some one was saying. "Only one in the county for the lord knows how many years." Then, "Stand back, you fellows. Don't frighten the poor beggar. Give him time."

And again, from another:

"Here, pull down the blind, some one. Can't you see it's the light that's troubling him."

The light faded, and Tengmalmi opened both his great round eyes wide. Also, one stroked him with a wary forefinger and, marvellously, he remained all downy powder puff with not a sign of the fish-hooks.

Then a man turned him gently right side up, and stroked him again. He snapped-beak more and yammered, but made no actual sound.

They had washed and dressed his wounded wing; cleansed, too, the blood stains from his clove brown, mottled, grayish-white breast.

Then spoke a voice, saying:

"Wonder if he's hungry? Must be, though. Think of his flight! How many hundreds of miles? Run along Jack and see if you can't turn out a mouse in the granery."

A pause followed then, filled with much tobacco-smoke, and then, at last, to his hookey bill was presented by five big men humbly, a dead, but still warm mouse.

Tengmalmi accepted the offering with throat working but silent thanks; and, most surprizing thing of all, without the slightest sign of embarrassment, beheaded the victim —holding it in the right claw, as I told you —first and bolted it whole afterward. Water, however, to wash it down with he refused—also with movements of inarticulate thanks—and continued to refuse, either to drink or to wash in ever after. He may, however, have got at some somewhere; a little, when no one was looking, of course, for they put him in a big cage outside, with perches and a large dark box of hay in a corner, meant once to have been an aviary for small birds.

Tengmalmi, however, with the marvellous healthiness of nature, soon showed when his wounds healed that he had no further desire for travel. Wherefore, his days he spent dozing on top of the sideboard in the dining-room, waiting for his master to come home from office when, throughout dinner, he would sit erect and blinking and muttering contentment upon that gentleman's shoulder instead of in his cage. And at night, though he was put into it, he was not in his cage either, for he found a way out with that facility captive owls have; and nobody knew quite what he did with his nights. Only the wings and tails of sundry

sparrows and the heads of various decapitated mice on and around the big oak-tree on the lawn gave clue why the sparrow population became decreased and downcast and why the mice suffered from scarceness and nerves and even the rats had a permanently preoccupied look.

In the morning, however, first thing when his master went to give him a good-by stroke before going to office, Tengmalmi would always be found, fluffed up, half asleep, rotund and silently wise on the darkest perch in the darkest corner of his cage—alone.

I mention the word "alone" advisedly, because one morning dawned at last when the hand that stretched out to fondle him was as hastily withdrawn. A gasp followed, an exclamation, then a long-drawn whistle, duplicated, but very softly, from the perch.

Then the voice of the master was heard calling from the cage, aloud and excitedly:

"Hi! You people! Come quick! There's two owls in the cage, not one. They're sitting side by side. Hurry up and come and see."

And so they were, round, wise, cool, calm and collected, staring with their eternal bored look of philosophic wisdom at the day and once more only whistling softly as a sigh.

Owls pair for life. Never heard that they were unfaithful, moreover. Still, I don't see how Madame Tengmalmi came to be there. Do you? I suppose Tengmalmi knew, the beggar. But Tengmalmi's only answer was sleep.

MAPLE SUGAR

by **F. W. Hodge**

WE OWE the Indians far more than they are indebted to us for many of the questionable blessings of civilization that we have foisted on them. The value of the more important food products which we derived from the Red Men—corn, potatoes, beans, pumpkins, tomatoes, chocolate and a host of others, all of which were cultivated in America centuries before the good Queen Isabella sold her jewels to help Columbus—aggregates untold scores of millions of dollars annually, and if we add the world's tobacco crop, our pecuniary indebtedness to the Indians is increased almost beyond measure.

Another food, as well as confection, for which we usually do not give the Indians credit, is maple sugar, which, like the others we have mentioned, was not known to the Old World before the French observed the Indians extracting the sap from the trees and subjecting it to the boiling process.

Joutel, in 1684, was probably the first to mention this primitive industry, but he was followed very closely by an English writer in the "Transactions of the Royal Society" for 1684-85, who presented "An Account of a Sort of Sugar made of the Juice of the Maple in Canada," in which it is stated that "the savages have practised this art longer than any now living can remember."

Lafitau, however, who made his observations in lower Canada in 1700-05, was not only the first to describe the process in detail and to illustrate it, but he says that "the French make it better than the Indian women, from whom they have learned how to make it." Then again, Bossu, writing in 1756, says: "After the first ceremonies were over, they brought me a calabash full of the vegetal juice of the maple tree. The Indians extract it in January, making a hole at the bottom of it, and apply a little tube to that. At the first thaw they get a little barrel full of this juice, which they boil to a syrup; and being boiled over again, it changes into a reddish sugar, looking like Calabrian manna. The apothecaries justly prefer it to the sugar which is made of sugar canes. The French who are settled at the Illinois have learned from the Indians to make this syrup, which is an exceedingly good remedy for colds and rheumatisms."

Canada was such an important seat of the maple-sugar industry among the Indians from the earliest times that the adoption of the maple-leaf as the insignia of the Dominion has added significance.

THE LOADING SHED

by Helen Von Kolnitz Hyer

HUMPS where the falling marl chunks land,
Hollow growls when the barrows creak
Up the slope to the weighing stand,
Swish of shuffling feet, where sleek
Lamp-black bucks in overalls
Bend and grunt till their shovels fly,
Gouging the pile where the phosphate falls—
Sixteen empties rattle by—
"Hustle 'um, big boy," comes the cry,
"Make 'um heavy an' bend yo' back,
Run de wheels off de railroad track,
Fill yo' barrels an' start to climb,
An' call yo' number ebery time."

Never a hand would shilly-shally
When the foreman called, "Come, make yo' tally."
You should have heard those big boys shout
As the wheel barrows rumbled in and out
Of the loading shed at the phosphate mine,
And the sweating darkies stood in line.
They used to sing as they rolled a load
To the top of the slanting, three-plank road,
On to the scale by the half-way track,

"The Loading Shed," copyright, 1925, by Helen Von Kolnitz Hyer.

Weighed the barrels and slung them back,
Rock and all, to the piling ground—
Unless they tipped four hundred pound.
"Hustle 'um, big boy, bend yo' back,
Rush 'um up on de half-way track,
Fill yo' barrel an' start to climb,
An' call yo' number ebery time."

Lord, how those darkies loved to cuss.
A light-weight barrel would start a fuss
Sputtering down the half-way track.
You see, a light-weight had to back
The whole gang down to the ground again
For the platform hung like a wooden lane,
Half-way between the roof and the floor,
Three planks wide and never more.
The light-weights caused a lot of trouble
But they never would make that gangway double.
You should have heard those darkies sing
Spirituals with a jungle swing,
Big bass voices booming down the line,
Deepest of all old Number Nine—
"Moon run down to the settin' ob de sun, de sun refuse to shine,
Sinner run to de end ob de world—Yea, boss, I'se Number Nine."

"Hustle 'um, big boy, bend yo' back,
Rush 'um up on de half-way track,
Fill yo' barrel an' start to climb,
An' call yo' number ebery time."

INTRIGUE MEXICAN

by John Dorman

Author of "The Lantern on the Cow," "The Seven Who Went but Once,"

THE sign on the door read

Don Luis Yncian—
Private Detective

And the door opened into a small, poorly furnished office, hidden away in an obscure section of a dismal building in San Antonio. Within the office were a desk, two chairs, a cot with a gaudy, imitation Navajo blanket, a battered and empty filing cabinet, a telephone, and a Mexican—Don Luis.

From the street below came a low hum of traffic. A fly buzzed sleepily against a soiled window. Don Luis napped.

The phone rang in a subdued fashion quite in keeping with the drowsy calm of the office, and he left the cot to answer. A medium man, Don Luis—in height, in weight, in years and in complexion, considering that he was Mexican.

"Yes," he said, putting the receiver to his ear. Then, after a moment, "Yes, everything is ready. The trap is set and baited."

He spoke English without a trace of his Spanish mother tongue, and even—which is much more remarkable—without a trace of his Harvard interlude. His father had been a man of wealth and influence once, but fortunes in Mexico are very subject to sudden change. For a little while he listened quietly, then exclaimed:

"*Por Dios*, any time! I am sure he is in town, because only this morning a lady said she did not expect him for weeks. But she paid her over-due hotel bill, bought new dresses, and she sings in her room."

Silent again, smiling. He waved his right hand lazily, laughed a little, said slowly, "He is Mexican. He will come!" and hung up the receiver.

Rising, he looked about him, his eyes half closed and the little grin still hovering on his lips.

Then from a drawer of his desk he took a half filled bottle of *tequila*, poured a glass of it and left both glass and bottle setting on the top of the desk while he sprawled again on the cot, still smiling. From where he lay he could see, through two windows, any one travelling the corridor to his room.

FOR three days Don Luis had spent his afternoons on the cot. The *tequila* still sat where he had left it. And there had been no visitors. Lying at ease the fourth afternoon, he saw through the windows a squat figure evidently Mexican, well clad in a business suit and a rolling black sombrero. Quietly he slid his hand into his coat pocket to caress the butt of a short-barreled, heavy-calibered automatic.

The man appeared in the open door.

Ynclan rose languidly to welcome him there.

They exchanged formal salutations in Spanish; Don Luis poured liquor for his caller. At length the stranger wiped his pock-marked, hard-lined face with a white silk handkerchief and began to reveal the nature of his business. His name, he said, was Antonio Moreno.

"I come from Pedro, your brother," he announced. "There are affairs in Sonora which may interest you."

"What did my brother bid you tell me?" Ynclan asked slowly.

"That the king is dead, Don Luis. The king is dead."

"Right!" Don Luis exclaimed, his somber eyes lighting. "Right! And what does that mean? I had a letter from Pedro. He spoke vaguely of a forthcoming—ah—election of new officials. Our old password, 'The king is dead.'"

Moreno smiled without great mirth.

"No more could be said in a letter, Don Luis. I come to tell you more and to ask your aid in supplying the—the sinews of elections."

Ynclan's eyes narrowed. He stared in perplexity. Then his face lighted in a wide smile.

"Ah, my memory does not fail me! Pedro mentioned in his letter that you were visiting San Antone! Ah, I did not think my memory would fail! I knew I had heard the name before. Also he said he hoped I would soon pay him a visit and might possibly see fit to return with Señor Moreno. Ah!"

Moreno's glance fell briefly on the black lettering which showed dimly through the frosted glass of the door, now closed. With the merest tinge of irony he said:

"You are very clever, Don Luis. Very."

Ynclan raised the glass of *tequila* to his lips, shrugged his shoulders carelessly.

"So, señor, I make my living! *Madre*, have I ever denied it?"

"No one, señor, would expect you to deny it," Moreno solemnly observed. "But it is indeed clever to become a private detective when one is—is perhaps not always within the law."

"The law, Don Antonio, was made for men. Is it not so?" Ynclan asked. "Men were not made for the law."

And then, quickly, he added—

"But tell me—everything."

For half an hour they sat with their heads together, whispering things regarding oil lands and mines, old officials and new officials, wars and rumors of wars. As Moreno arose to go he asked—

"One may find you here at any time?"

"Any afternoon, Don Antonio, any afternoon," Ynclan replied, also rising.

"And evenings?"

"Evenings, Don Antonio, I am—occupied."

"Singing at the window of some heavy-eyed señorita?"

Moreno's smile tended to soften the insolent sarcasm in his voice.

Don Luis laughed.

"In this day, *amigo*, there is little singing at windows and few flowers thrown from balconies or between iron gratings! At least on this side of the border."

"And where, then, may I find you at night?"

Ynclan's face grew stolid, but at last he said hesitantly:

"If there is urgent business, Don Antonio, at the radio station on the roof of the Atlas Building. There is a fire escape at the rear. I sleep there."

"Night watchman?" asked Moreno, letting his eyes rest on the words painted on the door.

Ynclan drew himself haughtily erect.

"My soul to ——, señor! Do you never read the papers? A gang of very bold and desperate thieves raided this station only a week ago, stealing much valuable property and stopping the broadcasting entirely. It is thought they will come again. It is necessary that a fearless and capable man guard the place. Who, then, more logically than I might be chosen?

"Blood of ——, is not my name renowned throughout all Mexico? The finest *caballero* of them all!"

His black eyes flashed.

Then, bowing and smiling, Moreno was gone down the corridor. Bowing, smiling, Don Luis watched him go. Intrigue had begun.

FAINT moonlight shone on the roof of the Atlas Building that evening. Faint moonlight revealing a low wooden structure and the lofty aerial of broadcasting station WRXZ.

Stepping with infinite caution, a squat figure climbed the fire escape, slowly

crossed the roof and peered into a window. Within, a small, heavily shaded electric bulb dimly lighted a great deal of electrical apparatus, strewn about in confusion. And on a cot in a far corner was what seemed to be the body of a sleeping man.

The prowler slipped silently to the door, tried it, found it unlocked and opened it noiselessly.

A cloth-wrapped club fell on his head. As he crashed unconscious to the floor, Don Luis Ynclan laughed quietly.

Then for two minutes he worked rapidly, searching the prowler for weapons. He found, unloaded and tossed out on the open roof a revolver; he dragged the man over to the cot, disposing of the blankets and pillows which had so much resembled, in the faint light, a sleeping man.

Still laughing, he dashed water in the man's face, poured *tequila* through his lips and abruptly stopped his laughter as the prowler revived.

"*Por Dios*, Don Antonio," he began as the man's eyes flicked open, "how could I know it was you? I did not expect you. You came like a thief! I beg a thousand pardons, a thousand! I am disconsolate!

"Here, let us drink to my forgiveness and our better acquaintance. Most excellent *tequila, amigo*. Better has not been stilled. But what brought you here so warily? Blood of ——, like a thief indeed!"

Moreno tossed off his liquor, rubbed his head and replied:

"A telegram from El Paso. Don Pedro asked that we leave at once. And I wished to be sure that you were alone before I entered. By the saints, that was a blow of blows!"

Ynclan waved quick hands protestingly.

"But señor, that you should think you could come upon Don Luis Ynclan by surprize! How dared you think so? *Dios, amigo*, it is well for you that I am a brave man or I might have shot you!"

He filled the glasses again, seemed suddenly to remember something, and said:

"But, Don Antonio, I can not leave! Impossible, señor, impossible! In a day or two, perhaps. Surely in a week. Tonight—I can not."

Moreno arose from the cot and sank into a chair at the table. Ynclan sat opposite him, with the bottle between them.

"I shall return, then, to say to Don Pedro that affairs of importance detain you, Don Luis? Affairs such as—as the guarding of this radio. *Dios*, what a jumble of devilish devices!"

His eyes swept over the confusion of wire and batteries. One hand softly caressed his aching head.

Ynclan's eyes followed Moreno's. Hurriedly he crossed himself, as a man does in warding off witches.

"A thing of the devils indeed, señor! That a man should from this place send his voice a thousand miles to be heard by a hundred thousand people whom he can not see!"

For a moment he seemed lost in thought, then his head came up belligerently, and he snapped:

"The guarding of this place is a mere incident in a very, very busy life, señor! *Madre*, but an incident! Besides, is there a train?"

Moreno replied shortly:

"There is an automobile at the curb below. At Nuevo Laredo there is an airplane. And what is so funny?"

Ynclan, refilling his glass again, was gurgling with laughter, which trailed off in a moment to smiling silence. Moreno slipped his hand quietly to the pocket which had contained his gun, reassuring himself that it was really gone. His little eyes glowed as he brought the hand away.

"What is so funny, Don Luis? That you raise a bump like an egg on my head and take my pistol? That is funny? I think not!"

Ynclan's hands waved their denial.

"No, señor. *Por Dios*, no! Have I not told you how deeply I regret having been obliged to strike you? Am I not sorry that I did not recognize you in time to prevent myself throwing your gun off the roof into the alley? My soul to ——, how many times would you have me apologize?"

Moreno's lips became a hard, evil line.

"Apologies be ——! I want a reason to give Pedro for your failure to go with me! Also I want to know what is so much to be laughed at!"

Ynclan's eyes were mere pin points as he answered:

"Señor, need I remind you to whom you speak? To Don Luis Ynclan, *amigo*. Have you forgotten? No man demands things of me. If otherwise, I can not control the situation. Is there not this?"

"This" was a long-barreled pistol, sleek

with oil, fitted with beautiful pearl grips. He continued:

"And you may tell Pedro that when I am ready I shall come to him. He needs me, not I him."

His lips curled. His eyes gleamed vauntingly.

Moreno sneered at the pistol lying at Ynclan's right hand and said rather softly:

"But we must not quarrel, Don Luis. Yet—"

He paused, expectantly.

Ynclan laughed as he poured *tequila*.

"Drink, señor! There may be no liquor such as this in paradise. A man had better get his fill on earth!"

For a moment he was lost in thought, biting his lips slowly as if making a decision. Then he burst out:

"Of a truth, señor, I must stay because I watch a trap I have set. And that is why I laughed. *Madre*, it is funny!"

His hand trembled as he raised the glass to his lips.

Moreno looked sharply at him.

"Who, señor, or what are you trying to trap? Pedro will not be satisfied with half answers."

"The Night Hawk!" exulted Ynclan, swaying a little in his chair. "The Night Hawk. No less!"

Moreno pursed his lips.

"Which tells me nothing, señor, nothing."

"My soul to ——!" gasped Don Luis. "And all Mexico rings with his exploits! Surely his infamy has spread to Sonora! Why, Don Antonio, he is the blackest and the boldest knave who ever breathed the air. Years enough the rangers have been after him. Of course, they are very stupid. *Dios*, never does he strike twice in the same place or use twice the same method, yet always they are watching the places he has been! Is it not like them?

"So you may tell Pedro that the hour the Night Hawk flies into my trap I shall be on my way to join the—the nominating committee in the new election."

After a moment of silence Moreno said:

"You will succeed where the rangers fail? This Night Hawk, I take it, is a bad man, a desperado?"

"*Por Dios*, a knave without soul or honor! Rather would he shoot a man from behind than in front. Rather would he poison him than shoot at all! As full of guile as the sea of fish! Time and again his nerve and cunning have carried him unscathed through hazardous affairs. And he is called a master of intrigue and treachery!

"Well for him he does not know that I will snare him!"

"And perhaps, señor," Moreno suggested, "it is also well for you."

"Bah!" snorted Don Luis. "Men say of me, 'Don Luis Ynclan, the best —— *caballero* of them all!' To any other this Night Hawk would indeed be dangerous. To me? Bah!"

"But tell me more," Moreno said immediately, "*Dios*, *amigo*, what is a joke unless two may laugh at it?"

Don Luis' rich laughter filled the room.

"Nothing, señor, nothing! Drink well! True it may be that no man ever pulled himself out of trouble with a corkscrew, yet so he may raise himself to joy!"

HE EMPTIED his glass and added:

"*Madre*, it is funny! A demon incarnate, that Night Hawk! From Brownsville to Del Rio his very name makes the shoulders of thousands twitch together. Makes other thousands most thoughtfully cross themselves. He trusts no one, boasts of what he terms his skill in 'diplomacy.' By the saints, if in one minute he could wish an enemy to death and in one year kill him by subtle craft, then that enemy could prepare to live a year!

"But he'll not be crafty enough for Don Luis Ynclan! My soul to ——! Was not my grandfather the boldest blade and the sharpest wit of Santa Anna's vast army? Was not my father pride of the rebels of the north? Am not I—"

"You are Don Luis Ynclan, very brave," broke in the purring voice of Moreno. "But you have not told me the deeds for which this bandit is so famous."

"No bandit, he!" laughed Ynclan. "A smuggler of liquor, drugs and women, but mostly of Chinamen. *Dios*, it is said he gets a thousand dollars for every Chink he delivers to certain laundries in San Antone and other places. Once there, who can tell them apart? Years and years they work under the man who bought their entrance to repay him. Then they in turn import cousins from China. They are all cousins, counting even to the hundredth degree.

"Drink well, señor, drink well! Any drink may be the last, for who knows when

the blessed saints will summon us to paradise?"

"It is," murmured Moreno with a hard ring in his low tones, "a little indefinite. But continue."

Ynclan rubbed the oil-sleek barrel of the pistol and stared at the ceiling thoughtfully.

"Well, he was born in Texas. Ill born, at that, but not a fool. A Mexican, and very early he went to Mexico.

"In the City of Mexico he was hand in glove with Diaz. Also he was rich and famous. But—ha, it is funny—when the administration changed, he was chased over the border with vigor and dispatch. Because he had been born in Texas, he appealed to the American government for help in recovering his lost property in Mexico. He was told that even if he were an American—there was little real proof, it seems—he must suck his own burned fingers when he chose to play with fire!

"So he vowed that he would take from the American government enough and more to compensate him for his loss. *Por Dios*, I think he has done it!"

Moreno nodded slowly. When he said, "You seem to know him well," there was no insolence in his voice, and even a shade of respect.

Ynclan laughed vauntingly.

"Well enough, *amigo*, to know that he has a *rancho* in Chihuahua where he keeps his supply of Chinks, bringing them across as he sees fit. Well enough to know other things as well.

"My soul, but the tales they tell of him! In a large airplane of his, they say in Del Rio, he was bringing a dozen Chinamen across the border. An American army plane gave chase. *Dios*, who would suspicion a ship when they are thicker than flies about a stable? Yet so it was, and this army craft pursued him, making signs for him to land and even firing smoking bullets before him.

"This Night Hawk's plane is a great bomber. He could not elude the army craft. Even so, he foiled his pursuers, as he would foil any man but one. And that one, Don Luis Ynclan!

"He dived into a cloud bank, straightened out and set the controls. Then he became very busy shooting Chinamen and throwing them over the side, just as is done at sea! Was it not funny? By the saints, yellow men must have fallen like rain into the mesquite! Five minutes later he landed in a pasture and submitted to a search. And that was that!

"No nearer has he ever been to capture, because he is infernally clever and more than infernally careful. Night Hawk indeed! Well is he named!

"One time he drives his goods across the river like cattle. One time he brings them over in a space built in the floor of a box car, packed like the petals of the rosebud. One time he brings them over in coffins, under death permits issued for American fools who took part in an election, but who in reality never lived. It is even whispered that once he hid some very small yellow men in the bellies of some very large dead horses consigned to a glue factory!

"By the saints, he is clever! But a soulless man, a man without any honor. Other smugglers of Chinamen boast that they bring their goods in clean, which means to some that the Chinks carry no drugs and to others that they have no diseases. This Night Hawk, he boasts that he brings them in!

"They may carry opium or the black plague, and what does he care? Across in Nuevo Laredo, in the Café of the White Horse, Juan Fernandez—the young Juan, branded on the cheek for heresy—told me that the Night Hawk once took across two lepers. Juan saw the web of filth between their fingers and the white spots of rotting flesh. He—"

Abruptly he stopped, to sink into a dull-eyed reverie, listlessly rubbing the pearl grips of the revolver. Moreno looked at him in silence, smiling faintly as he saw Ynclan's head swaying from side to side.

"So many have seen this Night Hawk, then?" Moreno asked.

Ynclan's eyes opened widely. Moreno repeated the question.

"*Por Dios*, thousands—across the border! Thousands, giving as many descriptions! And none who knows anything at all which would convict him, because he is very clever. *Madre*, it is funny!"

His laughter, begun boisterously, trailed off vaguely into silence. Again his body swayed in the chair.

MORENO'S crooked smile still lingered, and his eyes rested on the pistol, with bullets peeping from every chamber of the cylinder, as he said:

"And how does it happen, Don Luis, that

you know so much? The age of miracles is passed, you know."

Ynclan shook his head as if to clear it of a buzzing. His shoulders twitched involuntarily. And without hesitation he said:

"Because I am the best —— *caballero* ever come out of old Mexico, and no woman can resist me! From the Night Hawk's mistress, Lolita—her last name escapes me, señor—I learned the most of what I know, but not all. *Dios*, how could she help but tell when my lips lay on her own?

"A week—*madre*, when was it? Monday a week I was very drunk, and slept all day.

"Tuesday I played poker. Wednesday I went to Nuevo Laredo and shot a nigger. Thursday—yes, it was Thursday a week that this Lolita sought out the captain of rangers.

"Her hair was awry, her rouge was put on like barn paint, and she shook with anger. Also there were prints of tears in her eyes and prints of fingers on her throat. And she offered to sell the captain information about the Night Hawk, telling him enough to show that she knew a great deal and asking much money for more complete information.

"The captain told her to return the next day. Then he summoned me. He was, he said, very busy. Busy arresting men for selling corn liquor, and acting usually on 'information received'! Bah! Would I, he asked, take the case?

"I consented. I saw ways of making money. One of his men had trailed Lolita to a cheap hotel. I went there and took a room. Most interesting, señor, but when is flirtation not? Ha!

"The Night Hawk will follow his woman. She knows too much to be allowed to roam at large, and also he loves her. Men do not beat women in whom they are not interested. It is not worth the effort. When he comes, she will let me know. Or so she said. Ha, as if I ever believed a woman!

"And when he comes, she will welcome him with open arms and tell him that one Luis Ynclan boasts he knows enough to hang the Night Hawk higher than even night hawks fly. Also she shall tell him I made violent love to her and laughed at her. And that I know where go the Chinks which he brings in and many other things.

"She believes I know a great deal more than I do know. I have a way with women, señor! She'll tell him much, oh, so very much more than I told her, making him believe she has worked the information out of me while I was drunk, because I can simulate drunkenness to perfection, señor. She'll be frantic. She'll clear her own skirts, you see. *Dios*, but women are she ——!

"Then he shall come to kill me or deal with me. In her ears I have named him unspeakable things. Have told her that my knowledge will suffice to stop his operations. He is Mexican. He will come for revenge. Also he will come to see how much is known of him.

"Then I shall spring the trap! Perhaps I shall offer him freedom for a price and then sell him to the rangers. That would be funny, no?"

He laughed vacantly.

Moreno laughed softly in return.

"But you say he is very clever and very bold. A master of intrigue. Suppose he smells your trap, Don Luis?"

Ynclan blinked his eyes and sneered.

"There shall be no foolishness with Don Luis Ynclan, *caballero!* If there is, then another little scratch on the heel of the pistol! See, already there are twelve!"

Moreno nodded coolly and said:

"A beautiful weapon, señor! A very beautiful weapon. I think I would rather have it than the one of mine you threw away."

Drunk or sober, there is a duty no host of Spanish blood may forget. If a guest admires a possession in the house, be it grand piano or worthless trinket, it must be offered him. Etiquette also demands that it be refused.

Grasping the pistol by the barrel, Don Luis thrust it straight across the table, exclaiming:

"*Carramba*, señor, did I throw away your pistol? I—*Por Dios*, here, it is yours! I am disconsolate that I so hastily disarmed you! Here!"

Moreno, not so polite, bowed courteously and twirled the weapon on his forefinger. Ynclan continued:

"*Ay de mi*, Don Antonio, it has a history! *Madre*, the men that pistol has killed! There was the nigger who ran amuck in Durango. For him the first file mark is made. This will be two years ago in August, señor. And the three drunken sailors in Vera Cruz, may their souls rest in peace! And—*Dios*, so

many that I can not now remember! But there are a dozen marks for a dozen men."

Moreno balanced the weapon in his hand and said:

"A thousand thanks, Don Luis. Always I shall keep it. It is very beautiful, and as beautifully it fits the hand. But tell me how you will know this Night Hawk when you meet him and what you will do to him. I begin to see the joke. By the saints, it indeed is funny!"

Ynclan curled his lips scornfully, hiccoughed violently, pardoned himself and boasted:

"A tall man and thin with graying hair and a long scar down his right cheek. So Lolita described him. She should know. With the look of a devil, she added. And I shall wring a confession from him, señor, because without one the capture would be good for nothing. With it—"

His head sank on his breast. He struggled to raise it, then let it fall again.

"What prevents Lolita from running away with the Night Hawk as soon as he comes?" asked Moreno quietly.

Without looking up Don Luis murmured:

"Because all around her are spies. She could not leave the hotel unmarked. Within it she is not watched closely. Also the Night Hawk will not want to leave before he has seen me."

Moreno's thin lips leered back from his white teeth. His left hand came up to stroke his beardless cheeks. His tones were ripe with irony as he said, leaning across the table to jab the gun into Ynclan's stomach:

"Look up, *hidalgo!* Am I so tall and lean Where is the scar on my cheek?"

Ynclan fought back his drowsiness, blinked his eyes as they focused on the muzzle of the weapon, now presented at him from across the table. He bit his lips, mumbled inarticulate sounds and burst out:

"Señor, señor! For the love of ——, it is a loaded weapon! Point it the other way lest I take it away from you again! I am superstitious about having loaded pistols pointed at me! Be careful, señor, or I may become angry, and all men suffer in my anger! I—"

He hesitated, struggled to think and demanded—

"What was it you ask of me?"

Moreno smiled indulgently.

"I asked only, señor, if I were tall and lean, with a scar on my cheek. *Por Dios y todos los santos*, what a fool that girl did make of you! Or rather, God saved her the trouble by creating you a fool!"

He laughed in cold amusement, slowly drawing back the hammer of the pistol.

Ynclan's mouth gaped open.

"You—you— Are you claiming to be the Night Hawk? Not you, señor! Only this morning Lolita told me he had not yet arrived in San Antone."

Moreno's mirth was open and bold.

"Lolita told you many things as soon as she recovered from her childish impulse to give me up to the rangers! Did you not say you failed to believe her? Bah! The best —— *caballero* in all Mexico, are you? Bah!"

HE SETTLED back in his chair, still smiling, and calmly studied the flushed, perturbed face of Don Luis. Slowly he resumed:

"Up to a certain point, little one, you reasoned well. You did make it imperative for me to see you. You did convince Lolita that you knew a great deal of me. And no man with impunity makes love to my women!

"*Dios*, but you do simulate drunkenness to perfection, señor! Especially when you are full of *tequila!* And would it interest you to know how I came to announce myself as Don Antonio Moreno?"

Don Luis gazed at the burning eyes, at the pistol pointed steadily at his breast, but made no attempt to speak.

The Night Hawk, much amused, continued:

"The day that you and Lolita went to Breckenridge Park you enacted the drunkard's role so well that you fell asleep on her shoulder. While holding you, she helped herself to the contents of your pockets. And among them, Don Luis, was the letter from this Pedro saying that a certain Antonio Moreno was coming to visit you. Also it reminded you of the old password. Since you had evidently received the letter that morning, and I arrived the next day, it seemed only logical that I should introduce myself as Moreno, first carefully assuring myself that the real Moreno had not yet arrived.

"So I thank you for a most amusing evening. Most amusing. With the climax yet to come, Señor Doublecrosser! *Ay de mi*, how painful that you cannot appreciate the climax!

"A pistol shot will hardly be heard down

on the street, do you think? I was intending to take you out of the city a ways before shooting you, but it doesn't matter. Besides, with so many tires exploding these days, who heeds a pistol shot?"

A moment of silence, then the Night Hawk, fingering the trigger gently, laughed softly, as Don Luis' tongue flicked dry lips. And Don Luis' eyes, blurred and vague, swept around the room.

Slowly his dim eyes focused on the Night Hawk, settled on the cold, hard features, now twisted into a triumphant grin. Then the gleaming pistol drew them, as the seated man twirled it again on his finger tip.

Ynclan opened his lips, closed them, opened them—and hiccoughed. Yet gradually he was gaining control of himself. Presently he said with almost an insane glitter in the previously dull eyes:

"A most excellent joke, señor! Most excellent! You—the Night Hawk! See, I am laughing! Ha, ha!

"See, I am laughing!" he repeated.

Don Luis tried again:

"By the cross and nails! You, the Night Hawk! You, a tub of flesh incased in a greasy gut! You, to be the idol of Chihuahua's women! You, the scourge and terror of the border! You, the master of intrigue! You, the greatest brain God ever let grow in a killer's carcass!

"Ha, señor, tell me that you are the Blessed Virgin and I shall as easily believe! Drunk I may be, but drunk or sober Don Luis Ynclan is no man's fool!"

"But any woman's!" snapped the Night Hawk, on his feet and glaring across the table top. "And keep silent, you fool! You brothel rat! You *mestizo!*"

The fat hand holding the pistol shook raggedly; the fat face, with its vice-born hardness, was black with the rush of blood, distorted with the grimaces of anger. Then, with the steady snap and rattle to his words that there is in machine-gun fire, the Night Hawk defended his fame:

"Yes, I, the Night Hawk! I, the idol of Chihuahua's women and of many a one in Texas! I, the master of intrigue! And I, the master of this situation!

"You, with your lies and your leering! You, to trap me, who has disposed of two score men like you! The combined wit of a hundred of your sort would not suffice! You are Don Luis Ynclan, but I, I am the Night Hawk!

"From border to border, from gulf to gulf, my name is known and my wrath is feared! 'A *rancho* in Chihuahua, a great airplane!' *Por Dios,* any unshod peon knows as much!

"What would you not have given to know that there is also a *rancho* near Beeville? Or that the next shipment of goods will come across a mile, only a mile from Del Rio? Or that the Night Hawk is by day a highly respected buyer of cattle, with money in the banks of San Antone?

Eye met eye in silence. Slowly the Night Hawk reached within his shirt bosom with his left hand and unsnapped a crucifix from about his neck. His voice was less savage, more filled with ironic gloating as he continued:

"For you, Don Luis, the cross should be double, no? But take it. Very soon you shall know whether or not there is wine in paradise!"

Ynclan's tones were level as he asked—

"If I know so little, Señor Night Hawk, why bother to kill me?"

Musingly the man with the gun replied:

"Because you have seen me and know me. Because you made love to Lolita. Because you may know more of me than your drunkenness lets you tell."

For a moment the Night Hawk rubbed his chin slowly, chuckled and added:

"Still, you are a fool. *Dios,* what good would it do you to trap me? Do you think I would walk thus securely on either side of the border if there were witnesses who might appear against me? Or talk thus to any ears but those soon to be heedless forever?

"*Carramba,* señor, consider! Suppose you had not given me the gun? What is your word against mine? And do you think I visited this place without being very sure there were no spies around? Yet I have killed no man without just reasons."

"My word against a border thief?" asked Don Luis. "I am Don Luis Ynclan. You, a nameless, homeless man!"

The insult drew dark blood to the Night Hawk's swarthy face. He enjoyed the prospect of killing Don Luis. Even more so he enjoyed watching him wait for death. He did not relish such retorts. Then he laughed.

"I am Roberto Oyague! Ha, you know the name! Now what would your word be against mine? Ha! And now in justice to myself I must kill you, is it not so?"

FOR minutes he gazed at the passive Ynclan, drawing to the utmost the pleasure of the torture. At last he spoke:

"If you have prayers to say, Don Luis, say them. I must be gone."

His exultant eyes narrowed a trifle as he noticed that the intoxication seemed leaving his enemy and that Ynclan's eyes were now brilliantly hard. Don Luis grinned as he said:

"It is written that the prayers of the wicked are unavailing. Besides, you haven't the courage to shoot."

The dark face of the Night Hawk seemed like to burst in his passion. Savagely he jerked the trigger of the pistol.

The click of the hammer falling and the tiny explosion of a percussion cap alone resulted.

"Ha!" smiled Ynclan. "Shoot again!"

The Night Hawk shot again. Again and again and again, pulling the trigger with grim ferocity. Each attempted shot was as futile as the first.

Quickly he threw his arm back to hurl the pistol at Ynclan's head. Even more quickly Ynclan's right hand flashed into his coat pocket and a thunderous report shook the little room.

The pearl-gripped pistol fell to the floor. The Night Hawk's arm dropped limply to his side, and Don Luis beat out a small circle of burning cloth on the outside of his coat.

The Night Hawk clasped his left hand to his wound, watched the blood soak through his fingers and stared bitterly at Don Luis, in whose eyes a look of dreamy delight had come. And Don Luis was the first to break the silence, speaking as if he were alone and musing:

"There was never a brother in Sonora, señor. I thought perhaps you, being a master of intrigue, would appreciate a way to become acquainted with me. And those cartridges in the pistol I gave you, there was no powder in them. Only brass and lead. Also, when a man is full of olive oil he can drink a great deal of liquor without more than a trace of drunkenness. Did you know that?"

He lapsed again into dreams. Sharply the Night Hawk aroused him:

"Well, Don Luis? What now? You know I am Robert Oyague and very nearly a millionaire. Your word against mine because Lolita is my wife and not my mistress. You have trapped me, but to what account? *Dios*, you are a fool!"

His teeth clicked together as a stabbing thrill of pain went through his broken arm.

Don Luis laughed softly.

"It is because that I can act like one that my services are valuable, *caballero!* Not because I am one. From the beginning you have thought me a fool. I have thought you a very clever man. Now, it appears that we were both mistaken.

"Because you have talked more fully than ever I hoped you would, and I knew you would delight in giving reasons for killing me and in refuting the slurs I put upon your fame. You are Mexican. It is your nature to kill politely after discussing the matter with the victim. No? That is, of course, when there seems time for it!"

"I have talked! I have talked! What of it?" growled the Night Hawk.

Don Luis smiled with singular sweetness. "Because you have talked for a thousand ears, Señor Night Hawk! *Dios*, you should know better to believe the newspapers!"

The Night Hawk snorted.

"Do I look such a fool as to believe that in this mess of electrical stuff there is a radio sending apparatus in working order? That, I take it, is what you are trying to tell me."

But fear had replaced the anger in his eyes. His voice expressed no such confidence as his words implied.

Don Luis laughed.

"This, señor, was a temporary station, used while rooms were being fitted up below. That and that and that are microphones, which is all that are necessary, since the permanent set is in most excellent condition."

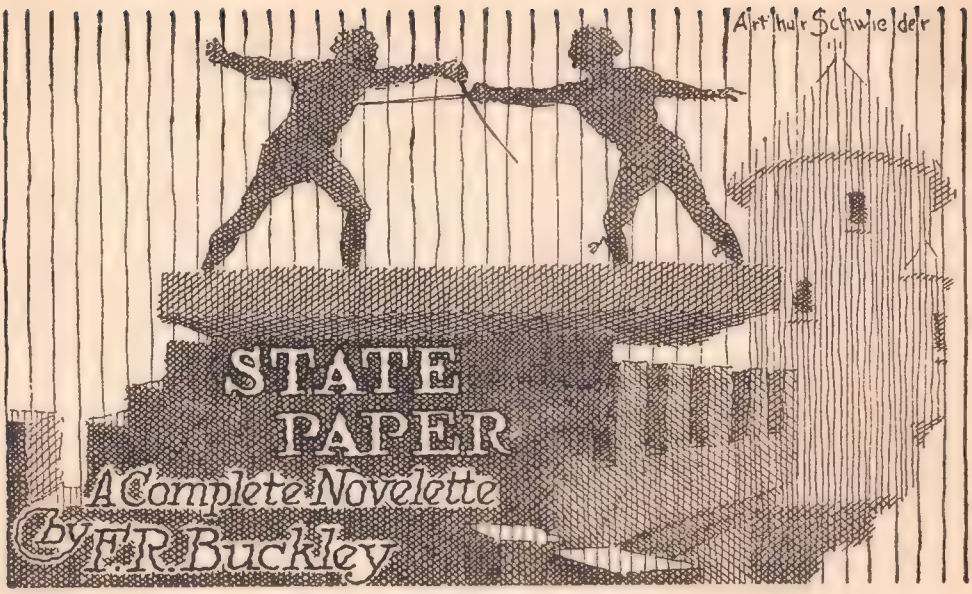
He pointed obligingly.

"A very powerful sending set, señor. Any whisper within two yards of those microphones will travel a thousand miles. And we have not been whispering. Very regrettable, Don Roberto, but you see how it is."

Again he laughed.

"*Carramba*, but Night Hawks should know that the night, these times, is full of prying ears! And when in a federal prison you boast of your exploits, say that you learned about intrigue from me!

"Steps on the fire escape, señor. Police and rangers, come for the prize! And Station WRXZ signs off!"



Author of "The Primitive Method," "The Bravo," etc.

TO HIS Most Excellent Lordship, His Grace, My Lord Duke of Rometia: from the Captain commanding the Castle of Two Towers—now besieged—these:

SIRE:

The man brought your despatch, which was not written in your own hand nor sealed with your own seal, commanding me to write down what I know about Elisabetta Sismondi.

Sire, I am not a writer, but a poor soldier wondering: *primo*, how this messenger won into the castle through two thousand of your Grace's —— of a cousin's picked men; and *secundo*, how long it will be before the said two thousand win into the castle also, since all my harquebusiers were laid low in the assault on this place, and no man remaining to me knoweth how to use the culverins with which the walls are armed. I used one myself during this forenoon's attack on the water-gate, swinging the accursed thing by the barrel like a flail; but this is not the proper method, though it killed some eighteen.

Elisabetta Sismondi was a still-room maid in the household of Count Ugo of Monterosso, and later a servant in the palace of your Grace's father, whom may God specially assoil, as especially needing it.

She is now with the blessed Saints.

If further news is needed, I beg your Highness to send further commands in such form that I may preserve them as a warrant. Let it be remembered that your Lordship's —— begotten cousin, who in person fired a pistolet at me this noontime, is striving to unseat your Grace from the Dukedom, as you are him from this County; and that what might interest your Highness about Elisabetta Sismondi might interest him likewise.

It would be more profitable to your lordship's Grace if—having been Captain of the Guard now forty-five years—I gave up the keys to this fortress, than if I surrender the keys to my memory.

I am wanted on the battlements.

L. CARADOSSO.

TO MY Most Gracious and Particular Good Lord, My Lord Duke of Rometia, from his humble servant, Luigi Caradosso, Captain—these:

SIRE:

I seem to recognize both your seal and the tone of your rebuke, though sooth to say the seal had slipped a little when it was placed on the wax, and the rebuke might as well have come from your Grace's infernal cousin as from your Highness' self. When you and the Count Pietro were boys of ten, and both living with your Grace's father, it

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was much discussed in the guard-room who had the haughtier mind and the sterner way of speaking.

I do not remember that we reached any conclusion.

It is my intent instantly to commence the writing of the history you command, for the which I shall have more time now that the Count Pietro hath withdrawn, leaving us in peace for the nonce, though I have trebled the sentries in fear of his well-reputed treachery. In this regard, witness the culverins of this Castle; the culverin is a treacherous instrument—even to its master; for after all it was with culverins that we beat off the siege. We had no success with them at first, as I informed your Grace, for the reason that when we captured this castle, the late Commandant—whom may St. Michael teach better sword-work—threw all the balls for these engines into the moat, leaving naught behind but the gun-powder, and that with a fuse to it in such manner that we should certes have been blown up had not the fire failed an ell from the magazine.

But when, having written to your Lordship the other time, I was walking upon the battlements thinking—for mention of Elisabetta Sismondi aye forces me to walk—I perceived that with rare forethought, your Highness' cousin had had all the stonework ornamented and tipped, so to say, with spheres of stone about the bigness of a culverin's mouth. There were also various cherubs' heads on the arms of garden-benches and such like. Praying, I had some six dozen broken off, and lo! when wrapped in clay they fitted the culverins excellently; and did great execution the next day when Count Pietro delivered his main attack; especially the cherubs' heads, which, either because they were not round, or because of their sacred associations, would curve sweetly as they flew and tear the ribs out of half a dozen men in a row. One of them barely missed your Grace's cousin, while he was trying to rally his men during the rout. I disciplined the cannoneer, and made him man-at-arms again for his disgrace; also because we have no more powder.

I return this despatch by your Grace's messenger for two reasons; first, that with due respect I do not admire his face, and to carry my full narrative he would have to stay a week in this castle; and second, that f he had the beauty of Adonis, or of myself when a young man, I would rather entrust such matter as I shall write to a messenger selected by myself.

I would still rather that your Highness did not demand this history of me. It will not be as amusing as the inventions of Messer Giovanni Boccaccio; and to come to your Lordship it must perforce cross country infested by the Count Pietro.

In the trust that your Grace's command may be cancelled, I kiss your hands and subscribe myself,

LUIGI CARADOSSO,
Captain.

HISTORY commanded by My Lord Guglielmo II Duke of Rometia, of Luigi Caradosso, Captain of his Guard, and now commanding the Castle of Two Towers. To be delivered to his Grace in person and none other, by the hand and upon the head of Michele Pagolo, a sergeant.

SIRE:

You do me a grave wrong. It is not for nothing that I was called the Red Fox when younger, and am now known as the Badger in allusion to my cunning and gray hair, gained in your Grace's service. I wrote you that we had no powder—though in fact we have eight barrels of it—because I suspected that the commands to write about Elisabetta Sismondi came from your Lordship's cousin, and that my replies were carried unto him. It was to test this I wrote about the powder; knowing that if what I feared were true, he would certes attack again; and I planned to have all the culverins shoot at him alone.

It now appears that I thought him more subtile than he is, for which I crave pardon; but I implore your Highness to free me from this charge of indiscretion—though I am about to be so indiscreet that my blood runneth cold at meal-times, and I cannot sleep of nights; even whereas your Grace's warrant for this writing is confided to a trusty hand, to vindicate me should I die.

Nay, I must drink wine before I can do this thing; and remain drunken till it is finished.

IN THE name of God:

Your Highness can not remember the Castle of Monterosso; for it and the village about it were burned and levelled with the ground, and their sites sown with salt by your Lordship's

uncle—father of Pietro, your Grace's present foe—twenty years since.

I can not keep on with these titles of nobility. I must be excused.

When I was a bare eighteen, however—and it was a bare eighteen, for my father in the mountains, though of good blood, was poor, and I had scarcely a pick of meat on my four bones—when, as I say, I started forth to seek my fortune, armed with my red hair and my father's two-handed sword; at this period, I repeat—though I perceive I have not said it before—Count Ugo of Monterosso was the great lord of the countryside, and the village that stretched from his moat to the foot of the Red Mountain was his capital. So he had pulled down many old houses and built many new ones which his people did not like as well; and straightened many streets that had been crooked, and widened many streets that had been narrow and so easy to defend; and in the midst of all had made a public square, after the fashion of the great Piazza at Venice, with a ridiculous little church in it, which his lordship called St. Mark's. The object of all this building and unbuilding—which eventually brought about his ruin, as permitting your Grace's uncle to assault the Castle directly—was the upbuilding of Count Ugo's state. He was a melancholy man who had schemed so hard that he twitched all over perpetually; and in the course of his glorious imaginings, he had most like become a little mad. In pursuit of this madness, he was definite that his daughter should marry either a reigning Prince or a Duke of five counties; and the way he purposed to compass this elevation was by great show and ostentation of his own state. Accordingly, his castle was crammed with many more retainers than he needed or could afford; he was ever receiving and banqueting legates from powers with whom he could not treat; and, most particularly, scarce a week passed but he turned his whole household and all his armed men into a procession, and went in pomp to his church. His excuse was the worship of some Saint; his reason was that he desired all the villagers, all the country-folk, in fact the whole world—for news travels—to worship him.

I arrived in Monterosso during one of these progresses, and had the good fortune to be standing in the great square—so to call it—when the Count came forth from the church; blinking and trying to look pious in spite of the light's hurting his eyes; his daughter on his right hand, and his lieutenant of the guard—most properly—three or four paces to the rear. This lieutenant, I well remember, was using both hands to settle his helmet back on his head after worship, when a man darted out of the crowd near me and made to stab Count Ugo with a dagger.

As your Grace well wits, state can not be maintained without taxation; and who knows, God may decide that this man had some reason for his attempt. His crops that he had raised in the mountains had been taken from him, and his wife and two sons hanged for rolling down rocks on the tax-collectors.

Still, he was within reach of my two-handed sword, and visibly about to do a murder; so I split him instanter down the middle of the head as far as the Adam's apple; and before his point had touched the Count Ugo, down he tumbled, wrongs and all, with a top to him like a bishop's mitre.

Well, with that one stroke my fortune was made, such as it has been; though at the time, according to the rule of such things, I knew it not; being too dazed with the deed, the crowd, the groan of horror, the sunlight and the jangle of the church bells, which the Count always had rung when he entered or left the place. Furthermore, mine eyes were, so to say, dazzled by the sight of the Count and his daughter as their faces grew clearer through the sunlit cloud of dust that the dead man had blown up in his fall. The Count, still crouching and blinking, had not moved except to raise one hand scratchingly to his chin, and to lower his weak eyes to the blood-muddy corpse at his feet; whereas his daughter had not moved a muscle.

This is the lady who, as all the world knows, became your Grace's mother; she had black eyes, like your father—on whom may the Merciful have mercy. Before I struck the blow her eyes had been fixed upon me, because, most like, my red hair made me notable. After I had split the man, she still regarded me with the same expression, though the hem of her dress was gore-spattered.

"Lieutenant," says Count Ugo, still scratching his chin and meditating over his corpse.

I had not known, until I heard that

wretched guardsman's greaves clattering as he trembled before his master, how still the crowd in the piazza had become.

"I was not speaking to you, filth," says the Count, flashing an instant's look at the lieutenant, and another at me. "I addressed your successor. Hither, Red-Head!"

The dust must have settled in my throat, for my mouth gritted as I closed it and stepped forward.

"Call forward two men of the guard," says Ugo, not looking at me.

There was no need to obey him, however; for two soldiers that had followed behind the lieutenant ran forward, saluted and placed themselves one on each side of their former officer.

"Take me this carrion," says Ugo, "and hang it."

Your Grace, I was young, at the time, and tender; also, as I have said, quite dazed; I thought he meant the man I had slain; and I stuttered something out, to the effect that the poor slave was dead already.

Your Highness' mother—then a girl of eighteen—burst into laughter; even the Count smiled; and a sad, terrible titter like the rattle of sailors' bones in a surf, ran round the square.

"I mean the living carrion, Red-Head," says Ugo. "This guard-lieutenant that guarded me not. From the window of the north tower. Thou art to have his place. Answer me not, lest I hang thee also. Away! Have him swinging before I reach the castle."

And—the Count's state being as much dependent, almost, on the quickness of his injustice, as on the magnificence of his horse-clothes—I got much credit for executing this order in time; though really 'twas the soldiers who deserved it; heat-sickness—or green-sickness—having laid me low just as the doomed man, at the foot of the tower he had used to command, lay and writhed in the dust and screamed for mercy. I think it was green-sickness; the stupid faces of the villagers, staring at him, brought it on; and I remember that, finding a full suit of inlaid armor in his room—which I inherited—that night, I threw it out of window into the moat—

Whichever my sickness was, however, the Castle of Monterosso was medicine for it, with its miles of low-groined corridors cold as death, and its discipline as relentless as—as what? Why, as death, also. The whole place reeked of death—death certain and quick to any one or anything that stood in Count Ugo's way; the silences of the keeps and the donjons sang of the same; and though, in the banqueting hall, day in, day out, roast meats smoked and musicians fiddled gallantly, the scent and the sound of the castle remained—death!

Perhaps Count Ugo desired this should be so; I think he did. Perhaps your Grace will understand—

I am become a little drunk, and do not trust my pen further this day.

II

AH, ME!

It may not have come to the knowledge of your Grace that once, when younger—though not much—and more foolish, and in prison to boot, I penned something that was nearer a romance than a despatch—it was a defense of a friend of mine against a calumny; however, it taught me the pleasure of flying back into the past on the feather of a pen.* And when I start thus early with the history of Elisabetta Sismondi, I am indulging myself with this delight, excused by the fact that your Highness demanded to know all about her.

Furthermore—but I have a sealed warrant for the indiscretions that lie ahead of me.

Alas!

A week after taking service with the Count Ugo—being a bright youth, aged by poverty beyond my years—I had settled into my uniform, got over my squeamishness forever, and learned all there was to be known about my duties from one of the sergeants. They were simple enough; merely to go around the walls, inspecting sentries, four times a day; to act impressively during the reception and escort of guests; and to represent temporal pomp during the Count's weekly bids for heavenly glory. Also—under pain of hanging out of the north-tower window—never to fail in anything the Count had ordered; still less in what he had not ordered; and never, under any circumstances, to divulge any information of any kind whatever to any one.

At the end of the week, I was sent for by the Captain of the Guard, whom up to then I had seen but twice—a melancholy man

*"Cartel to Wm. Shakspere," *Adventure*, Nov. 30, 1924.

by the name of Felipe Nero—and informed that since I had shaped well, mine was to be the honor of meeting Count Pietro of the Two Towers, who was arriving that day to visit Count Ugo.

"I should be meeting him myself," says Nero sadly, "at the ford of the river to the north, you know—his land lies to the north—but that a Cardinal is coming whom I must meet at the ford of the other river—to the south. I suppose he will have a big train, and that I shall have no sleep for a week."

"Why not?" I asked. "Surely we have no concern with a Cardinal's train?"

Nero cocked his eye at me dismally.

"Only to see that they find out nothing the Count would not have them know," says he, lowering his voice. "Seest these gray hairs? Thank God only that Count Pietro rides almost alone—though in himself he is the spying match of the —— train of the Cardinal that ever wore a red hat. It is time you were starting. Take six men."

Now, this Count Pietro of the Two Towers was, of course, your Highness' uncle; the elder brother of your Grace's father; and the father of the Count Pietro whose eyes may God blast if ever they fall on these lines—as I fear, in spite of seals, warrants, and all precautions, they may; for verily the son has inherited the cunning of the father in full measure, and a world in which he lives is no world into which to send writings about Elisabetta Sismondi—to whom, with every letter I indite, we come nearer, alas, and nearer—

Where was I?

Yes—this elder brother of your Grace's sire had been exiled from the Dukedom because his desperate ambition and love of intrigue were well known, and your Grace's grandfather had no mind to lose the Duchy before his death, or even by means of his death by poison. As a sop, as a bribe and as a curtain before the eyes of other States which would have welcomed a quarrel between father and son, the old Duke had given Pietro a County far away in the hills—adjoining, as it happened, the domain of Count Ugo of Monterosso.

I was leaving the guard-room, quite ignorant of all these things, when Felipe Nero gave a sort of groan of compassion, beckoned me back to his quarters, shut the door, locked it, bolted it, led me to his bed which stood in the middle of the floor and in a whisper communicated the news.

"Moreover, our Count and he," breathes Felipe in my ear, "are playing blind-man's-buff to see whether Pietro shall or shall not wed Griselda. Each wants to know which is the more powerful; and neither can find out. Above all, tell nothing to Pietro of the Two Towers."

With which ominous words, and the spectacle of Felipe shaking his head sadly over me as I went to the door—I was permitted to depart. What wonder that when, two hours later, I met the Count at the river, my heart gave a jump that might have bulged my breastplate, while large drops of the dew of fear rolled from under my morion into my eyes?

He had but two riders with him—armed with harquebuses, they were; while the Count wore no armor, and carried only a little light rapier. He was accustomed to fight with his brains, as his son is, ahime!—and like his son he was a tall, thin, dark man with large black eyes. Also, when he cared to he could smile like God's own sunshine, at the same moment thinking the devil's own thoughts.

He now smiled at me.

"Ha-ha—a new lieutenant?" he asked, graciously holding out his gloved hand for me to kiss. "And where is our trusty Rafael?"

"He is in God's keeping, my Lord," says I; and then, fearing that I had said too much, added, "no doubt."

"But alive," pursues Pietro, staring at me compellingly with his great eyes, "or dead?"

A direct question, your Highness will observe; about an unimportant matter, seemingly; so that if I did not reply, it would be insolence; whereas if I did, it might be hanging.

"This Rafael," I therefore answered after a moment's thought, "was no longer in my Lord's guard, my Lord when I became lieutenant. The Captain will be able to inform your Lordship further.'

The Count Pietro looked at me, slightly nodding his head and smiling, never unfixing his black eyes from mine; and finally shook out his bridle, clicked with his tongue, and moved off. He rode ahead, with myself at his side and the guard behind us, as the custom is; but the only words I spoke all the way to the castle were "As God wills, my Lord"—in reply to his question whether the vine-crop would be good that year.

We approach Elisabetta Sismondi, and I must see what like was the vine-crop in these parts ten years ago.

HEADY.

Of course, much of the terror I felt of the Count Pietro was fear of the unknown—I was unaccustomed to intrigue and politics in those days, and one word was as dangerous as another, meseemed. Whereas now at this day I should have little fear of such a man—I can keep my mouth shut on important things while chatting amiably about the unimportant; and even when I am commanded to write that which should not be written, I can take precautions, as your Grace has seen, subtly enough to defy even that subtle ——'s —— of a son. Since I have cracked that bottle, the idea has come to me of sending this narrative to your Highness in two parts, of which one will mean little without the other; by two hands, at different times. What a benefactor is wine, your Grace, even though it doth make the ink flow so strangely!

To come straightly to the point—I had lodged Pietro in his suite with all due ceremony; had eaten my dinner in the guard-room and learned that the Cardinal's train numbered near thirty, mostly priests; and was passing down a corridor on my way to inspect sentries when lo! I turned a corner and bumped full into a maid-servant who was carrying a tankard of something or other somewhere—it was sack, now I bethink myself; my doublet smelled of it for days. For of course, womanlike, she let go of the pot in the hurry, and down it fell, spilling its contents on the flagstones.

As a rule, a soldier does not tell serving-wenches he is sorry for anything he may have done; but this girl had such a carriage, and such a pair of eyes to boot, that before I knew it, I had taken off my morion and begged her pardon—which she granted very sweetly, and as if she had been accustomed to granting pardons to guard-lieutenants all the days of her life. Sometimes there does emerge, from a peasant family, a boy or a girl with the features and the actions of a nobleman; though how this comes to pass is really too deep for me to divine. My writing is shaky at this point, your Grace, because a fly keeps settling on my pen. I am not laughing.

Of course, I recovered my senses in an instant, and laughed in her face, and asked her name and, when she told me "Elisabetta Sismondi," said it was a pretty name and kissed her heartily for having been so christened.

Upon which, if your Grace will believe it, she swung her left arm and boxed my ears in the second style; by which I mean as follows, namely; that there are two ways in which a woman can box a man's ears; the first is done for the benefit of her virgin aunts, present or not present; the second is done for her own satisfaction. I have experienced both; though for mine own credit I must say that Elisabetta was my only sample of the latter. The first and the last. The alpha and the omega.

Ah me!

Well, I staggered—having had a little wine at dinner, to christen my first turn at escort-duty and diplomacy—I staggered back, I say, and nearly sat down in the angle of the wall and the floor; it was a magnificent slap she had given me, your Highness; a whole-hearted clout; and at that time I was not versed in the ways of telling one smack from another.

Accordingly, I arose, seized her by the wrists, and was about to convince her of what she had missed, when lo! from my left side arrived something which struck me most painfully on the jawbone, and knocked me quite down, with a clatter of armour, on the floor. It was a fist, this time, and no flat hand; so that, as I arose, I pulled my rapier out of its loops, and prepared to avenge myself both for the blow and for the slap.

Such is the mind of man!

However, it was a friar that confronted me; a Franciscan, judging by his brown habit and his rope; a young monk of my own age or a few years older—with large eyes which, though they were not so impenetrable, reminded me strangely of the eyes of my lord the Count Pietro of the Two Towers.

Nobody under the rank of Duke, as your Grace well knows, may run a monk through the body; so I halted, staring at this apparition with my sword-point an inch from his throat. I call him an apparition because, your Highness, he said nothing; he had appeared noiselessly and from nowhere; and because, like all phantoms, having appeared he acted strangely. Had I not had wine taken, I would have sworn that he

had reached with his right hand for the left side of his frock, smock, robe, or whatever they call it, as if to draw a sword.

"I thank you, reverend father," says Elisabetta Sismondi, turning her eyes from him to me. Did I say some time back that they were remarkable eyes? I cannot find the page on which I said it, if I did; but no matter—to say it again will do no harm, *per Bacco*! They were blue—a strange liquid blue like the sea in the summertime, at the point where the shoals end; and the pupils were not black, so to say, but rather like still bluer flowers on the ocean's floor.

The sight of them made me mad—it always did. The very thought of them always does, even now—even now! Your Grace will excuse my presumption.

Anyhow, they made me reach forward, catch the young priest by the arm; and with my naked sword still in my right hand, lead him out on to the battlements.

"Brother," says I to him, when we had covered the distance between the door and the first sentry, "Reverend Father, if you prefer the term—you have overstepped your holy office. You have become, in the language of the mountains, a sheep with a ram's horns. You have smitten me, knowing that I was forbidden to smite back."

He gave a violent writhe in my grasp.

"Fellow—" he gasped.

"One moment," says I. "We must not be overheard. Sentinel!"

The first sentry saluted and replied—

"*Piacevole, signor!*"

"*Bueno,*" says I, leading the friar onward. "Now, since I am forbidden by my early training, which none regrets more than myself, to deal with you properly, shaveling, I will solace my soul by telling you what I should have done had you not been sworn to peace, to the avoidance of blows on the bare flesh, and similar vanities."

"I—" he began again, furiously; but he was not as strong as myself.

"Ssssh," I therefore commanded him. "You have done the striking; the talking belongs to me. After you had struck me, I should either have run you through the body—about four inches below the navel, for choice—if from your garb I had considered you to be a serf; or, had you seemed noble, I should have spat in your face, preferably between the eyes. This, as you do not know, is the most insulting—"

At this, he writhed himself entirely free, and stood gasping and groaning by my side while I addressed the second sentry.

"*Piacevole, signor!*"

"*Bueno,*" says I, reaching for my friar's arm again; but he would not let me take it; though he walked along by my side of his own free will.

"I do know what is insulting, clod!" he burst out, five yards away from the alcove where the sentinel was stationed. "I do know! And in sign thereof, I pull your nose!"

And by gadzooks, he did it; and so did my passion mount to my head that I would have killed him there and then, friar or no friar, damnation or no damnation, but that he unexpectedly whipped out a rapier from under his robe—reaching down the bell of his left sleeve for it—and met my first thrust with a very neat parry—in *secundo*, if I remember aright; yes, *secundo* it was, there on the battlements; because I saw his nails glitter—they were polished—as he turned his blade over.

Having parried, and seen me fall back half a pace in sheer astonishment, he dropped his point, held up his left hand, and spoke as follows:

"I have placed my life in your hands," says he.

"Out of which," says I hotly—I was very young. "the said life shall soon be spilled into ——. Up, sword!"

"Nay," says he, watching me, but making no motion to guard. "We will fight—you will not kill me thus; or if you do, all well. If it were known in the castle, though, that I, coming in the suite of the Cardinal as a friar, am no friar—I should perish in most dishonorable fashion before dawn. It was on the point of honor that I betrayed myself."

"It shall be on the point of honor that you die," I assured him. "Will you have the goodness to accompany me on my tour of inspection?"

"With the highest expectation of a pleasant encounter," says the monk, bowing and shoving his sword back where he had had it from.

SO, MUCH to the surprize of the guard, we made the round of the battlements together; chatting, as I remember it, on subjects such as the color of the sunset, the lowness of the water in the moat—it was summer—

and the peaceful look of the village below, whose threads of chimney-smoke were ascending straight toward the new stars, dissolving only into the blue night air as they reached the height of the battlements; and bringing to our nostrils the scent of chestnut-wood.

Aye, chestnut-wood; and whenever I have smelled it burning since, I have thought of your Highness' father that evening; for the monk—at least, the young man in the monk's robe—was your father, as he told me when at last we stood facing each other, swords drawn, armor and monk's robe doffed, on the flat top of a catapult-platform of the south bastion.

I mix my words somewhat. He did not tell me he was then your Grace's father, for at the time he had not had that pleasure and honor; but he told me who he was—the second son of the Duke of Rometia; this to satisfy my longing to spill none but noble blood.

"But," I told him, "your elder brother is also here."

"That is one reason for my presence," says the young man through his teeth. "On guard, *Messer Teniente!*"

So we went at it.

The Count Ugo's face was most sternly set against all quarrelling and duelling within the castle; not so much because he cared who killed whom, but because he thought it derogatory to his appearance of power, that any should dare brawl under the terror of his presence. The beauty of this catapult-platform—which I had noticed on my second day in the castle, and which I now explained to your Highness' father—was that by a mere push of the foot—or even by the winning sword-thrust itself, the platform being very small—the victor in a little affair of this kind could drop the body of the vanquished eighty feet into the moat; where, falling from such a height, it would assuredly stick in the mud of the bottom, and be comfortably out of the way.

"As the more acquainted with this place," I remarked, as we crossed swords, "you observe that I take the outer edge of the ground. However—"

I meant to complete that sentence by running my adversary—if your Grace will pardon my having contemplated the liberty—through the gizzard; he parried strongly, however, and missed my throat by a finger's breadth; upon which, after a rapid series of parades and an attack in *septime*, I resolved to try my father's old trick. It worked to a marvel, as it always does when properly performed; I regret that I was never able to teach your Highness the art. I jammed my point into the scroll-work of my adversary's hilt, caught his point similarly in mine; and then, by bringing up my knee smartly against the locked blades, sent his rapier humming up into the air.

For a fraction of a second—knowing I had the enemy at my mercy—my eyes followed the flight of the blade; and in that fraction of a second, your Grace's sire caught hold of my sword with his right hand; but, so far from trying to wrench it out of my hand, merely pulled it gently towards him; and, as I tightened my grasp and made to tear it free—thus cutting his fingers cruelly—he pulled more strongly.

"Your pardon," he says at last, smiling and pointing behind me," but your heels were already over the edge. Had you tried to lunge, you would have fallen."

He nodded at me graciously, and folded his arms. He also sighed and looked up at the sky, in the evident expectation that I should thank him by murdering him. The world, alas! was not so civilized in those days as it is now, though so few years have passed.

Instead, however, I dropped my sword, flung both arms around his neck, and almost wept; a strange proceeding for me, your Highness, then as now; and the cause was Elisabetta Sismondi. Since I had looked at those sea-flower eyes of hers, the thought of violent death, until such time as I should have come to know her much better, had been growing by the minute less attractive.

How strange it is that the things men wish to live for—especially women—so often get them killed!

"Ssssh!" says Guglielmo, as I started to swear blood-brotherhood or some such nonsense—a guard-lieutenant and a Duke's son! "Ssssh!"

"But that, at peril of your life, you should —" I began to protest; when he silenced me with a hand over my mouth in such sort as almost to loosen my teeth.

"Silence!" he hissed into my ear. "Some one approaches along the battlement. Am I to be found with my monk's robe off, and sacrifice a Dukedom to your fool's gratitude?"

I was not then much acquainted with Princes, your Grace; or I should have known that if a nobleman had saved my life, as this one had, it was for his own convenience, not for mine. Being ignorant, I was, as it were, chilled by your Highness' father's remark; dazed by his sudden change of manner and infuriated by this lash on the emotions—which were, and are, the tenderest part of me, because least exposed to the air.

However, some one was approaching—no doubt of that; two persons, indeed; and, realizing that it would not soothe me to be clapped under arrest for fighting, I obeyed Guglielmo and stood silent.

"Tonight, I say, Pietro!" arose a woman's voice from the battlement below us.

The footsteps came to a halt; and then lo, the voice of the Count of the Two Towers began, much less blandly than was its wont.

"Griselda," says he. "I have told you that the thing is impossible. I can not propose an alliance to your father—much less a marriage—while things are in such a state. No one knows—especially since this cursed Cardinal arrived—which way the cat is going to jump; and—"

"There was no talk of cats jumping when you made love to me on this battlement six months ago," says Griselda, in a voice like steel. "It was not as an heiress to power you besieged me, but as myself. Now in the same mode, go ask my father for my hand. Tonight! You have excused yourself long enough."

"Griesida. Hear me, I beseech you. This is no time for imprudence—for haste. Cardinal Spigozzi is here—the greatest schemer in Italy. He may come from my father, to propose an alliance against me: he may come from Rome to propose an alliance with Ugo against my father. He may—"

"He may go to the ——," says Griselda, who, certes, I would not have suspected of such passion. "I do not crave pomps, Dukedoms, or alliances, my Pietro: it is yourself I want, and it is yourself I will have—alive or dead! For if you demand not my hand of my father tonight, by the Virgin I'll tell him all, and have your throat cut before matins."

"Ah, you ——!" snarls Pietro, leaping forward, by the sound, and making to strangle her.

"Back!" says she, "or I'll stab thee here and now!"

I assure your Grace that in the following silence, we could hear them both breathing, far away though they were, and with all the noise of dish-washing rising from the kitchens as well.

"I can not do it tonight, at all events," says Pietro in a shaky voice—he did not much care for violence, except when directed by himself against others. "Your father is in council with the Cardinal."

"They are conferring in the turret of the north angle," says Griselda levelly. "I will take you there, and pass you by the sentry into the ante-room; and you can wait until they part. As for me, I will not wait longer."

"Not even to be a Duchess, rather than—"

"Listen, my Pietro," says the girl, gripping her stiletto more tightly, as I could judge from her voice. "Duchess, Countess, or galley-slave, I wish to be thy wife. It is time I was."

There was another long silence. Then Pietro laughed—shakily—to show his entire unconcern. And the girl mocked him.

"Then—as you will." says the Count of the Two Towers.

"It shall be as I will, by ——!" says Grieselda.

AND with that they went away; leaving me—being ignorant of the ways of the nobility as aforesaid—most sorely distressed and more dazed than ever; for up to then I had not known that those set in authority over us were subject to the same humanity as other creatures.

Guglielmo, however, had known this for some time; and action, rather than stupefaction, was his response.

"What is thy name?" he demanded, shaking me and putting one arm around my shoulders, at the same time smiling in his excitement. "Luigi? Well, then, Luigi, remember, I pray you, that I saved your life—at the risk of mine own. It was yourself said it."

"And it was yourself—" I began, wrenching myself free and blushing.

However, he embraced me again. Ah, your Highness, he was the perfect model of the perfect Prince; ready and able to do anything for the gaining of his ends; aware that when the ends were gained, the means

thereto could be concealed from all eyes by a couple of yards of ermine.

"Listen, Luigi," says he. "What is a moment's choler? You would have been dead a great many moments—down in the mud, with the newts swimming over your face, had I not gripped your sword and cut myself with it to the bone."

Well?" says I, advance-aware that he was about to demand recompense.

"I must know what goes on in the north turret," says Guglielmo passionately, "both between the Cardinal and Ugo, and Ugo and the Count, my brother; and, perhaps, what passes between my brother and the Cardinal as well."

"It is impossible," says I, half turning away.

He swung me around again, and I felt the blood from his cut hand trickling down my arm.

"It is easy!" he whispered fiercely. "I marked the tower this afternoon—it juts out from the battlement; its only window faces outward; but there is a ledge around its base, a man's height below the window; and there is a line of decoration, waist-high, which would give a hand-hold. You can step out from the battlement upon that ledge, walk round to the window, gripping the ornamentation, and thus hear everything that passes within."

"Standing eighty feet up over empty air and the moat," I snarled, "to betray my master, eh?"

"Betray thy master?" demands Guglielmo, horror-struck. "Luigi, I swear—see—I swear on the Holy Cross, that I have no such intention. The Cardinal is here to arrange marriage between myself and the Countess Griselda. I came in his train, disguised, to see whether I could abide her."

"And I suppose," says I, "that you are aching for alliance with my master—through her—after tonight. Ha-ha!"

"I am, you fool," says Guglielmo. "Yonder is a fine woman—she knows what she wants. Her character marches with mine. When we have succeeded to the Duchy, we shall become a power. Venice and Florence will be nothing to us. I am better than a man, and she is worse than a woman."

In my ignorance of politics, your Highness, I felt my stomach turn over.

"At all events," says I, picking up my armor, "I'll not play spy for you."

He sighed.

"Then I must try it myself," says he, "for else, the Cardinal may betray my father and me and the Count Ugo, to my brother for money, and we know nothing of it until bravos cut our throats and mercenaries descend on our lands."

This struck me, but I said nothing; and Guglielmo held out his hand; his right hand, all blood. I did not touch it for fear of giving him pain; but he said I must.

"I am attracted to thee, Luigi," says he, "and would fain we should have known each other better."

"We may," says I, "if you speak sooth, and are not betraying of my master."

He laughed—gallantly and airily, as he could when it suited his purpose.

"I shall betray no one, even if I wished it," says he, "for the first step I take on that ledge, my wounded hand will slip on the ornamentation, and splash! I shall go into the moat I saved thee from. Well—think of me sometimes; and God be with you."

Sire, I cannot explain myself; well I wot that I should have called the guard and had him arrested, whether Count Pietro would have cut his throat or poisoned him, or Ugo have suspected and slain him, or not. But I could not; nor could I let him fall into the moat and be swum upon by newts. Besides, he had sworn upon the Cross that by helping him I should be helping my master; and later it was proved that he spoke truth; and whether or not, I will cut the throat of whoever calls me traitor.

As he turned to descend from the catapult-platform, I stepped after him.

"Sir," says I; and he turned about.

The words stuck woundily in my heart, but I forced them out.

"I will do it."

"Nay—"

"Yea."

Now Michele is ready to depart with this, the first part of the narrative commanded by your Grace, which sealed command I preserve. I fear I cannot continue it much further without telling more than should be told about Elisabetta Sismondi, and I beg your Grace, if it is possible before I despatch a second piece hereof which will be a week hence or so, to countermand the order. Yesternight I had an awful vision of your Highness' cousin reading what I have written, and laughing that laugh which

is so much like his father's. Only the fact that I have said nothing deadly so far, preserved my reason while I slept.

I kiss your lordship's hands, in fear and trembling.

Subscribing myself

L. CARADOSSO,
Captain.

TO HIS Highness Guglielmo II, Duke of Rometia; under the care of St. Anthony and of Paul, surnamed Dog-Teeth, a sergeant—these:

Since I have not heard from your Grace, I continue, *vi coactus et sub protestatione*, as the clerks say when racked—

Leaving your Lordship's father on the battlement, I climbed out upon the ledge he had told me of, and with my heart in my throat gained the window of the tower. I say this quite simply, and without detail, because to this day the thought of that climb makes the cold sweat run into my eyes, and the sole-muscles of my feet cramp themselves as I turn my toes under. There was a *chevaux-de-frise* directly under me, belonging to the sally-port; and the light of the guard-lantern far below shone on its steel points. Though aware that it was death to look down when no more than eight finger-holds sustained me in mid-air, I could not tear my eyes from those points until, suddenly, the voice of Count Ugo spoke as though in my very ear.

The reason for this clearness was, that the tower window was cut through the thickness of the wall, narrow at the inner end, and wide at the outer, according to the custom; and this funnel magnified, as it were, the sounds within the room.

"Speak clearly," says Count Ugo, nearly making me loose my grip in my terror. I did loose the ornamentation, in fact, my fingers being numb; but in the act of falling, I gripped for the edge of the window and caught an iron bar which was set in the masonry.

"Surely," says a most pleasant voice—like unto a mixture of wine, as it were, and butter, "surely the matter is most clear. Your Lordship commissioned me to find a suitable husband for the Lady Griselda, bearing in mind your Lordship's ambitions—"

"Yes, yes, yes," snarls Ugo, "and you tell me you have found one, have not found one, that you come from the Duke of Rometia, that you do not come from the Duke of Rometia, that you have power to negotiate, that you have no power, and so on. Now, plain speech if you please, *messire!* You have had money the raising of which near got me murdered the other day, and—"

"Peace, peace, my Lord," says the rich and benevolent voice. "A little patience. The marriage of a great Lord's daughter is a serious matter. I but treat the subject with the respect it deserves. I will arrange my thoughts."

While he did so, in silence, I gathered courage to raise my eyes above the level of the window-sill, and look into the room. Ah, sire! now, when men conspire in their worst clothes, that they may impress one another with their poverty and surprize one another later, there are no more sights like unto that.

The Cardinal Spigozzi, who was nigh seven feet tall and had white hair and a face like a saint, was in his full scarlet, with a cross on his bosom rich enough to have ransomed all the martyrs; and three or four rings on each finger of the hand with which he was shading his eyes. On the other hand, which lay on the table, carelessly, just where a candle would shine upon it best, there was but one gem—a ruby; but it was big as an harquebus ball. He was, as I learned later, a notable intriguer; a bringer about of things—marriages, alliances, and so forth—that could not be contracted openly between the parties; and he blazed with the tokens of his successes.

As for Count Ugo, he was in Flemish velvet, of black broidered with great flowers in gold; and around his neck he wore a gold chain that bent his head even farther forward than usual—with a great diamond in the center of each link. The diamonds flashed and glittered as he twitched.

"My Lord," says the Cardinal Spigozzi at last, "the position is thus. The best hope for an alliance is with the Duchy of Rometia."

"I know it well. But who is she to marry—the old Duke, the son, the other son—?"

"We must confer," says the Cardinal gravely. "The old Duke is not at a marrying age. I have talked up your state to him; I have hinted that you are approached by Venice with an offer of common interest; it is possible that he might consider a marriage with his younger son, Guglielmo. On the other hand—"

"A younger son," says Ugo, clawing the table.

"But a favorite—and in possession," says the Cardinal, bowing. "On the other hand—it is to be considered whether a marriage with the Count Pietro, as elder son, in exile though he is, might not enable—er—means to be taken—"

"Pietro and I, acting together, might seize the Duchy?"

The Cardinal spread his hands.

"What power has Pietro?" demands Ugo.

"That he would needs tell you before an alliance could be made," says Spigozzi, "and—he would ask the same of you."

Ugo took his thumb in his mouth, and began to tear strips of nail off it, crosswise. It was a question he could not answer to Pietro's satisfaction, and well he knew it.

"If only that younger son were dead," says he, suddenly darting a glance full of venom at the Cardinal.

Spigozzi leaned forward across the table. Ugo took his thumb out of his mouth and craned to meet him; and as for me, my heart stood still. Now, it seemed, was the crucial moment; the Cardinal and the Count were staring into each other's eyes at a hand's span; Spigozzi had his mouth open to speak.

But slowly, slowly, he closed it; and slowly he leaned back in his chair again.

"Under God," says he, breathlessly, as though he had escaped a pitfall, "it would simplify matters. But—"

He shrugged his shoulders, folded his hands, and examined all his rings lovingly, one after another; finally raising his eyes from them to the face of Ugo, who was staring at him like a dog robbed of a bone.

How incredible it is to me now, your Grace, that I should have heard what I heard, and seen what I saw—this last interchange of gaze above all—without understanding that the Cardinal was offering your father's decease, given money enough; and that Ugo was doubting whether he had treasure enough to bargain! Yet no such suspicion crossed my mind; even when Ugo, with a nod, rose suddenly and said he must take leave for a moment, to speak to his steward.

He went out; and, two minutes after, Pietro came in. Griselda had left him in the ante-room; he had concealed himself behind a hanging, or some such thing, from an interview with her father, I doubt not, and seized the opportunity for an audience with Spigozzi. Ah, cunning fox! slippery and poisonous snake! Never has there been one like him—save his son. The moment he entered, his eyes flashed to the window—from which I had withdrawn in preknowledge of his subtlety. He did not trust the empty air, eighty feet above the moat; not he.

"My lord Pietro," says the Cardinal hastily, and in an agitated voice, "you are well met. Hold. Listen to me."

"I have listened to you enough," says Pietro. "Twenty thousand ducats have you had of me, on the assurance that this bladderful of boasting, Ugo, could help me powerfully against my father. Yea—and to make all sure, I made love to the daughter ere I had sounded out her father's state myself—"

"Ah, foolishness!" says the Cardinal.

"On *thy* assurance," snarls Pietro. "And now she demands that I take her for her sweet self, regardless of politics, or she sets her father against me. And to cap all—you arrive—lo! a deputy from my accursed father."

"To bring peace, by whatever means—" stammers Spigozzi.

"Ah, rat your peace, traitor, double-dealer!"

There was a silence.

"There is a method—" says Spigozzi, in a very trembling voice. "There is a method—"

"Ah—"

"Nay, wait! Wait—"

"Wait—after I have waited half a year, and with Ugo's self coming back in a moment! I—"

"It is a matter," says Spigozzi, "in which—in which—the Count and yourself—the Count and yourself—would be concerned—together; and—and the Lady Griselda's wedding—"

Another silence. And I, out there on the ledge, even now had no idea that the method was the betrayal of Guglielmo, and his murder by his brother and the Count. Incredible innocence!

"This time," says Pietro, in a considering tone, "I believe thou hast something really to sell. What will be the price?"

"Peace—" begins the Cardinal.

"And a few abbeys," snarls Pietro. "Cease canting, I pray you! That window irks me. I will block it before we speak further."

He was the kind of man who, furthermore, would have thrust to right and left of the opening before blocking it—so suspicious he was; and so, loosing the bars, I moved away along the ledge, nearly carrying all that I had heard down with me into eternal silence on that instant; for my fingers were still too weary to grip the ornamentation for long.

It was just by a desperate leap, at the last, and the gripping of my arm by your Grace's father, who was waiting in the shadow, that I regained the battlement.

"Fool!" he growled by way of thanks. "Pietro is in there now! This is the time to listen!"

"He hath blocked the window," I gasped.

Guglielmo chuckled.

"He would—he would. Ah, clever devil; but—not so clever as I. Nay, nay. Now—back to the platform where we fought, and tell me all."

"All that I can without treachery to my master," says I.

It was, however.

III

I WAS about to say, yestereen, when interrupted by the bursting of one of those cursed culverins, and the killing of four most useful men—that it was not left to me, however, to decide what would be treachery to my master and what not, in respect of my revelations to the then young father of your Grace.

I have said before, that he was the perfect model of a Prince; in no regard more so than in his ability to decide questions—in which he was involved—for others, with an authority that brooked no question, even when he contradicted himself. Folks may talk of divine right, your Highness, but this ability it is that rules Kingdoms; the power on the part of some men to convince others, for example, one day that to kill is wrong; and the next, that it is right. Without this, there could be no wars; and without wars, there could be no Kingdoms—

This is not to the point, but the sight of dead men always makes me moralize; long as I have been in the trade.

The point is that young Guglielmo overrode my objections, had the story out of me within a quarter-hour; and left me in trembling doubt as to my fate in this world and the next—for I was, as aforesaid, very young and unaccustomed. I tossed in my bed all night; awoke feeling the need to become drunken; and, since over-indulgence in wine during day-times was most sternly forbidden by the Count, set off for the still-room in search of Elisabetta Sismondi.

All the maids were there, polishing silver and goldware under the eye of the kitchener; but Elisabetta was in an alcove, scrubbing at a great three-handled cup; and by making as if to pass through the room on my way to some other place, I came to stand by her unobserved.

From the first glance, her eyes—the blueness of which it is impossible to describe—had me drunker than wine could have got me under four hours; though, in the beginning, they were set in a stern face.

"Forgive me, Elisabetta," says I, having previously—in my quarters—burnished my equipment and watered my hair to give the plea more weight.

"Forgiveness for that is permission to do it again," says she.

"It is my greatest desire to do it again," says I, "but not in that way."

She looked at me now, and I saw that, despite herself, she was struck by my looks; as well she might be in those days.

"Ah," says she, "with no monk present, you mean."

"Nay, with a monk present," says I, "to marry us."

Breathing short through a dry throat as I was, I instanter perceived it when she commenced so to do; moreover, she dropped the rag from her hands and clasped her fingers as she stared at me, the pupils of those marvellous eyes dilating so that I most clearly saw mine own image in them. We said nothing, neither were we aware of the chatter of the other maids for a long time; and then, with the kind of effort at which women are so much better than men, she picked up her polishing-rag again and bade me begone.

"You mock me," says she; and the words gave me courage to grasp her by the wrist.

Of some things, your Grace, I knew much for my age; though not enough.

"I mock thee not," says I. "And moreover, thou likest me. Thou had seen me before we met in the corridor last night; and liked me; and that is why thou boxed my ears so hard."

Now she dropped the rag again, and

turned red, and then pale, and said I was a sorcerer, and I said no, but that I was bewitched; and we talked on; and we came to an understanding that we were to be formally betrothed that week, and married when God willed; and the kitchener came, praying me to leave his maids and get back to my battlements; and I begged him to leave me and get to the ——; and for the rest of the day I paraded the castle deliriously happy, asking men-at-arms their Christian names, and whether they were married, and how they liked it; and, when they told me, pitying them for having wed some lesser woman than Elisabetta.

The sight of the monks of the Cardinal's train, scurrying hither and thither across the courtyard, gave me certain twinges of memory and of apprehension; I hoped to see Guglielmo; also I feared to see him; further, I wished I had never seen him; but in the air-walking state I was, neither hope, fear nor wish had much abiding power.

Even the melancholy pronouncement of Felipe Nero that the whole guard was to be on duty all night, failed to sadden me. In fact, I was paying the first price of imprudence—fear of the night-hours; it seemed better to be awake and armed, after what I had told Guglielmo, than naked in bed.

"Wherefore?" accordingly I asked Felipe light-heartedly.

"There is to be a banquet," says he, dismally, "though for whom, I know not. The Count and the Cardinal would have been feasted last night if at all; and there is no order to escort any one today. Yet there are to be four boars' heads, and a cake made to represent the castle, and the wine-fountain is to play, and all the plate's out, and the musicians have been caterwauling all day in the west tower. Further, as I say, both watches of the guard are to be on duty—in the banqueting hall; except eight sentries, two to a wall. See thou to setting them."

"Aye. But have you no guess," I asked, "as to what all this is for? It is a great state affair, seemingly."

Felipe was walking to the door.

"Have you no guess?" I repeated, thinking he had not heard; and he turned about, eyeing me drearily.

"If I had," says he in his dead voice, "should I be setting thee a good example by naming it? Nay. Nay."

With which, shaking his head, he went and locked himself in his quarters: emerging only once—and then but as far as the waistline—to say that the guard would dine at seventeen o'clock, and that all equipment must be especially burnished.

Ah me, your Grace! What with the burnishing and what with some extraordinarily good wine which appeared in our tankards that night without word as to who had sent it, how I did shine when I arose from table! And of course my first thought was to go dazzle my betrothed and —— the kitchener.

It was he —— me, however—greasily and indirectly, as kitcheners do.

"She's a-saving of her soul," says he, turning around with a spoonful of sugar-stuff in his hand, and his sweaty face all grinning.

"How so?" I asked.

"She's out in the courtyard with a monk," says he, tittering. "And there goes the guard-bell, Messer Teniente. Hurry, hurry, brave man!"

And—though first I took his spoonful of slop and flung it in his face—hurry I had to, without seeing whether this monk were or were not Guglielmo, your Highness' father—whom may God pardon. I had to hasten to where my company was drawn up, and shout at them bravely though my heart seemed contracted to the size of a pea; and march them clanking into the banquet hall, yet empty save for servants and some dozens of low castle-folk whose function it was to kneel when the Count should enter.

THE musicians were playing already, in their gallery which was approached by a staircase from the floor, and also by a passage from the east wall; I daresay they were discoursing sweetly, though at that moment I took great pleasure in drowning them out by bellowing my orders at my men. Being ignorant of the ways of Princes and of women, I was in awful doubt concerning the monk and my Elisabetta, and in fit mind to criticise the choir of angels had it been present.

"You will stand behind the Count Pietro," says Felipe Nero, having posted his men. "Now, for —— his sake, get your company across yarely. What ails thee?"

"A Cardinal takes precedence of a Count," I growled, not because I had sooner

stand behind Spigozzi, but because I was heart-sick.

"And a captain of a lieutenant," snapped Nero. "Do as I say, boy! Post thy men, and take thy position! The great doors are to be opened in a minute."

So there I stood, behind the empty chair to the right of Count Ugo's, while the mass of the banqueters entered pell-mell and swarmed, fighting, into the lower tables; gaping, as they fought, at the garish decorations of the hall; red velvet hung in festoons—at —— knows how many crowns the yard, and all sweated out of those same banqueters—with shields in silver and gold from the armory; armorial bearings in costly enamels, supposed to represent the Count Ugo's forefathers; and at intervals great bunches of the flowers of the syrinx, whose scent combined most ill with the odor of the cooking, and the reek of perfume from the wax-candles.

After the commonalty entered the folk who were to eat at the two higher tables—the upper officials of the castle, and the gentry of the neighborhood; they disgusted me, feeling as I then felt, more than the first-comers, for they bore nosegays to ward off the smell of their inferiors, and instead of fighting honestly to sit near their betters, stood about chittering of precedence. They were too wise to stare at the hangings; but their eyes bulged covetously out of their heads at sight of the silver wine-fountain and the plate.

Finally they were all seated; and a trumpet blew a long call, and two doors at the upper end of the hall—near us—were flung open with a crash; and the guard presented arms, and the music struck up, and in came the Count Ugo with his daughter on one arm, and the Count Pietro on the other, and the Cardinal Spigozzi walking a trifle behind. The commonalty and monks at the bottom of the hall fell to their knees; the folk at the upper tables rose to their feet; and then, as Count Ugo came to a stop behind his chair, Felipe Nero bawled out—

"God save my lord the Count Ugo!"

"God save his Lordship!" groans the assemblage in two hundred voices.

Ugo shot a rat's look sidewise at Pietro to see how this show had impressed him; and, twitching, grinned; and, grinning, nodded his head down the room; after which four servants seated him with Pietro on his right and Griselda on his left. The Cardinal was to the left of Griselda again, with a special canopy of state in red velvet to atone for his lack of high place; he was trying to talk with her, but she was paying him, it seemed, very little attention; she seemed preoccupied, playing with her fingers in the lap of her yellow dress.

At last she leaned over to her father, spoke to him, spoke to Pietro and appeared to insist on something with both of them, until Pietro nodded pettishly, and the Count, in a temper, used his bare fist to hammer on the gong that stood before him.

"Silence!" roars Felipe Nero. "Silence for my Lord Count!"

"Silence—silence—silence!" echoed the ushers down the hall; and a hush fell, even the monks ceasing their chatter.

"The great cup," says Ugo to his servants; and they brought it, all ready prepared; the three-handled flagon Elisabetta had been cleaning that morning; now filled to the brim with wine, on whose surface floated more of those sickly white blossoms.

"Tell them to stand," says Ugo; and Felipe Nero cried the command.

Then Ugo, and Griselda, and Count Pietro and the Cardinal all arose. There was a little page-boy, I remember, under the body of the great silver flagon, holding up the weight of it while Griselda in her yellow, and Ugo in his red silk, and Pietro in his black with silver flowers on it, each held one of the handles.

"I invite you, gentles and my people," says Ugo in his quavering voice, blinking over the cup and twitching so that one of the syrinx-flowers was cast up, most draggled, on the silver lip, "to witness the betrothal of our daughter, the Lady Griselda, to the lord Count Pietro of the Two Towers, the eldest son and rightful heir of His Highness the Lord Duke of Rometia."

The Cardinal, clasping his hands and looking upward, delivered himself of some Latin; the Count's trumpeters, stationed by the door at which he had entered, blew a long fanfare that near deafened me and made the candles flicker; and then, as Ugo sipped some wine from the cup and signed Griselda and Pietro to sip together, Felipe Nero drew his sword and waved it, yelling—

"Long live my Lady Griselda!"

"*Viva, viva!*" cried the body of the hall, anxious to get at the remaining wine in the cup.

"Long live my Lord Pietro of the Two Towers!"

"*Viva, viva!*"

"Long live our good lord Ugo of Monterosso!"

"*Viva, viva, vivaaa!*"

The Cardinal Spigozzi, also, desired to be wished long life; but he was under his canopy and could not catch Felipe's eye; and so he sat down sulkily first of all, and the great wine cup started its voyage, rocking and slopping, down the tables, from the highest downward toward the lowest.

As for the guard, no one offered us any; and, moreover, it was difficult, by ——, even though we had dined, to see the waiters staggering about with their loaded platters, and be forbidden to molest them.

How many dinners have I watched others eat! How many things that I desired have I seen others take—and guarded them during the taking! As your Grace shall see.

The great folk at the Count's table began their meal with sweetmeats; but the lower orders—or it may have been only the monks—with salad; a salad of lettuces, with vinegar and oil on them.

I know this, and am not likely to forget it; because, bare ten minutes after the *vivas* had died down, I perceived a figure in a brown robe arise from the lowest table with a pewter plate held high, and advance up the hall at a flying step, bearing his salad with him. He was on my side of the hall—that is to say, he was approaching the Count Pietro; and though Felipe Nero cocked an eye at him from behind the Count Ugo's chair, he did nothing until, half way up the hall, the monk raised his right hand—which was bandaged—in the air, and began to cry clearly and loudly:

"Poison! Poison! Poison, my Lord Count and good people! Poison!"

Then Felipe left the Count, dashed past me and flung himself, tugging at his sword, to meet the crier; who, since the sword stuck in its loops, struck Felipe under the ear with the arm he had upraised, and knocked him senseless. I, springing forward with my blade out, caught my foot in a fold of the Count Pietro's robe and went sprawling; and before I could recover myself, the monk—he was not a monk, of course, but your Highness' father—had planted his foot on my neck, and flung the salad off his pewter plate full into the face of his brother.

A leaf of lettuce, all dripping with oil and reeking of vinegar, fell opposite my eyes; and even in that moment, I could descry the particles of diamond-dust glittering on it. Diamond-dust. as your Grace knows well, is a most excellent poison; it hath no taste, it needs not to be bought from an apothecary who may die and confess; and it kills after a long time, and after the manner of a low fever. But this had been clumsily administered; the poisoner had wished to make too sure.

"Guard, guard!" I heard Ugo screaming; and with a vision of the north-tower window most clear before my eyes, I writhed from under Guglielmo's foot, rose, and fell on him from behind; an unfortunate fall for me, since, still gripping Pietro's throat, Guglielmo flung his head back and nearly broke my nose; but fortunate for him because, staggering backward, I still kept the capouche of his robe in my grasp, and so ripped it all down the back. Instanter he loosed Pietro, slipped the habit off, flung it over his brother, and then hurled himself on the writhing mass of brown cloth, stabbing into it viciously with a dagger—while the men of my guard stood, sword in hand, wondering what to do with a monk who wore plate-armor under his robe. As for me, I had dropped my rapier, and my eyes were too full of tears from yon bang on the nose for me to find it.

Felipe Nero was the only man in the place who kept his wits; and that after recovering from a heavy daze. He was coming up the hall with his sword drawn, bellowing to the guard to cut at Guglielmo's head; and Guglielmo heard him and with a last stab into the bundle that was his brother—it did no good, since Pietro was wearing chain-mail under his clothes—your Grace's sire kicked me in the face as I at last found my rapier, snatched the blade up himself, and bolted for the staircase to the musicians' gallery.

Felipe Nero, covering the first four steps after him at one bound, almost overtook him at the head of the stairs; when Guglielmo turned about and, in full view of every one in the hall, ran the poor devil through the throat. Moreover, to clear his blade, he put his foot on writhing Nero's chest, and kicked him clattering down the stairs, to die at the bottom.

"Harquebuses!" screams Ugo, hammering on the table with his two fists, his eyes

staring and his mouth like a cod's. "Shoot him down, guards! Fire, fire!"

At that time harquebuses were not carried for ceremony, so we had none; but, furious at the killing of my captain, I called two men to follow me and rushed up the stairs at the killer. He laughed when he saw me coming, your Grace; and he snatched up one of the instruments the musicians had dropped in their flight—a *viola da gamba*, it is called, with a long spike at the end on which the player rests it—and flung it at me, spike first, so that all three of us rolled backwards with the —— fiddle twanging in our midst.

"*A rivederci*, dogs' sons!" called your Highness' father gaily then; and the next instant had sprung into the passage leading from gallery to battlements; the babbling crowd in the great hall howling and milling as it strove for exit by the two doors farthest away. As for me, picking myself up, I turned to look at Ugo; and found him staring at me with blazing eyes, while Griselda, one hand on his shoulder and her mouth by his ear spoke to him rapidly. He was nodding, nodding, as well as twitching all over; as for Pietro, he was sitting in his chair, his face all gleaming with salad-oil, and trembling in every limb.

"Take a file of harquebuses and hunt me this fellow down," says Ugo at last.

I saluted; and he beckoned me nearer.

"Shoot him from such a distance that it can be proved you saw not his face," he muttered, looking at me in a way that promised hanging for me later. "Understand, fool! And begone. No thanks to you we are not all slain!"

I glanced at the Cardinal, who had fainted with his face in a jelly-dish; called my men to follow me, ploughed through the mob of banqueters to the armory, drew weapons, and started to obey orders. It was as we left the guard-quarters, running toward the steps leading up to the north rampart, that the oldest sergeant of the company gripped my elbow.

"You could escape now, by the postern," says he. "Lieutenant, the Count will hang you after this business—either for failing to kill this monk, or for killing him. Mark me!"

"Then it will be for killing him," says I, starting up the stairs with my teeth clenched on the memory of poor Nero. "Shoot him in the body, men, at first sight!"

Some bold—or drunken—fellows from the banquet hall, though, had flushed our game for us; and the first sight we had of the quarry was as he ran, sword in hand, past the head of the staircase, thrusting at me, who was just gaining the level, as he passed.

"He's done for," mutters my sergeant. "Look! Another party's gone up the other stairs—he's on the south wall while we close in from the east and west—and the sentries there to boot. Poor lad! Light your matches, men."

There was a little moon—enough, I suppose, for Guglielmo, in running, to perceive that his escape was cut off; though this perception did not make him spare the two south-wall sentries who turned from their posts to see what all the hullabaloo was about. Nay, he ran one through the throat as he had run Felipe Nero; and the other he slashed across the two eyes and blinded him for life. Which done, he mounted the catapult-platform where we had fought and, waving his sword, gallantly invited the world to come at him.

We advanced down our wall, the matches glowing and making our armor gleam as the men blew them; and I think he saw us. At all events, he started to laugh; a sound which, though very fearless, chimed in ill with the screams of the blinded sentinel.

"Rest," says I, when we were within forty or fifty paces; and the men put the crotches under their barrels.

"Aim at his belly," says I; for, having the armor on it, this shone best in the dim light; and armor will not stand against harquebus balls.

Ah, your Grace, what a near escape was that! For I had drawn in my breath to give the order "Fire!", when from the main-gate look-out turret, where the horn-man keeps, resounded the long blast with the three flourishes that means the arrival of some important person, or of an armed force. And the arrival of an armed force, or of an important person either, at that hour of the night, was strange enough to make me swallow my spittle and turn about; the harquebus-men also.

"Shall we shoot?" asks my sergeant. "It is your Honor's duty to parley with these newcomers instanter."

"N-nay," says I, "unless he tries to escape."

"A spark may fall into the pans," says the

sergeant. "Shall we wipe matches and go surround the foot of the platform?"

"Y-yes," says I, as the horn-blast sounded again, followed by a confused noise of shouting from outside the main gate.

And with that I hurried off to the north battlement, where the great door was; never, moreover, shall I forget the sight that met my eyes.

UNDER Guglielmo I, your Grace's father, the cavalry of the Duchy of Rometia was much polished and haberdashed—under my care, that is to say; but in the days of your grandfather, it was a rough, a shaggy, and a terrible body of horse, with armor still dented and faces still scarred from adding new lands to the domain; and it was your grandfather, with the whole body of his horse, that had followed in the trail of his favorite son; suspecting treachery. He was sitting on a great black charger whose forepaws were in the mud of the far bank of the moat, and behind him his three hundred heaved and fidgeted like a basket of evil black lobsters, under the flare of the torches. They had torn great knots of pine-wood from Count Ugo's trees as they came through the forest, and while greasy smoke arose, great flakes of flame fell dripping among the horses' feet. They looked like an army from hell.

"Who comes?" I shouted; and a herald pushed forward; but the old Duke was tired of formalities.

He shoved the herald back, and raised up his ancient voice, hoarse and roaring, in a most terrible string of blasphemy and oaths, demanding entrance forthwith, and the return of his son; and promising, if a hair of his head had been hurt, to cut the throat of every man, woman and child in the county —which he would have done, though he did call them men, women, or children, but by filthy names awful to hear his white beard wag over.

"I will advise the Count Ugo!"

The Duke cursed horribly again and, with a roar to some of his people, spurred to one side. I then perceived that in the midst of the cavalry, in the front rank, slung between two horses, there was a great long culverin, whose mouth was trained on the gate. Behind it a man sat with a torch, ready to put fire to its touch-hole at a word; and flame was dripping from his pine-branch as he sat.

"Advise the old dog from where thou art, then," he roared. "For, by ——, if thou disappear, or the portcullis moves, I blow thy gate in! Yell for him, scream for him, call the old ——!"

At this very instant, there was a scuffling of slippers in the gallery behind me and, turning, I perceived the white face and the red eyebrows of Ugo himself, twitching and trembling more than ever.

"Who is it?" he croaked. "Who is it, Lieutenant?"

But the old Duke had seen him, too.

"It is I!" he bellowed. "I, Andrea of Rometia, come to pull thy kennel down about thine ears, thou foul-bent wind-bag, thou four-handed plotter, thou double-faced ——. Open thy gate, before I blow it down, Judas! Judas with the red hair! Open, Antichrist!"

The cavalry laughed at that; but Ugo did not. Nay, I thought he would have a fit on the spot; so did he shriek for the gates to be opened; and so did he froth at the mouth as he promised me hanging if I had slain young Guglielmo—whom, he protested while tearing out his hair, he had not known.

Ah, dear me, your Highness! That was the first time in my memory that my stomach revolted at the bare sight of a fellow-man; or, in fact, that I knew a nobleman could be a fellow-man, as such to be revolted at. The Count Ugo, so stern and so bold but an half hour before, now to be a quaking jelly of terror, trying to push his most jealous prerogative of justice on to my shoulders; calling all the inhabitants of Heaven to witness the truth of his lies; babbling, and so weak about the knees that it took two of us to lead him into his own banqueting hall after the gates had been opened, and the cavalry had ridden in.

I can see them now, those battered, bearded, muddied, and unwashed soldiers, lounging about the courtyard and roaring with laughter at the Count Ugo as he tottered across between us. *Ay di mi!* And in the years since then, I have come to look very like them myself; to be battered, bearded, and to laugh at counts.

The old Duke—who, like his men, was muddied to the hips, and whose face showed a long old sword cut, purple and red, all across the forehead—had flung himself into Ugo's chair at the banquet table, and

was drumming with his fingers while he awaited the arrival of Guglielmo. He did not give Ugo the compliment of a glance. Pietro, I conjectured, had tried to go away, and had been forbidden; for he was sitting in his place, next to his terrible father, with a face like ashes, trembling still. At him, with bitter contempt, Griselda was staring as she stood near the Duke Andrea on his other side.

After a little, Andrea looked at her, not without admiration; in the light of the waning candles.

"Thou art the wench, then, that my son came so far and so foolishly to see, ha?" he rumbled. "Could not be wed politically, eh? Disguised in a Cardinal's train, ha, the young fool—and knowing his brother was about here, ready to cut his throat! Wert thou worth it, I wonder, mistress?"

"As God's my witness—" began Pietro.

"As the devil's mine," roars his father, lurching toward him, "I'll cut thy throat at another word!"

Pietro leaped up from his chair, oversetting it; and the next moment, young Guglielmo, escorted by six men of his father's troops, came into the hall. Never have I seen such a change in any one, as in the Duke Andrea then. From the edge of murder, he leaped into floods of foolish tears, embracing your Highness' father, kissing him, and feeling his shoulders and arms to see there were no bones broken, I suppose, like a peasant mother whose baby hath fallen in the road.

"Thou fool!" he sobbed, resting his white head on Guglielmo's shoulder, "thou'st near killed me with terror! But for one of thy girls at the castle telling me thou'd gone off thus, thou'd have been slain."

"There, there, father," says Guglielmo, shoving the old man back roughly. "All's well."

Andrea turned around, pointing a quivering finger in quest of the Cardinal, who had risen and gone. So instead he pointed at Ugo, who shrank before him.

"Hardly was that red-hatted —— departed," he snarled, "when from a sure source I learned that all this was vanity—that this old rabbit kept a cardboard state. Spigozzi was betraying me, and he shall know it!"

"Nevertheless," says Guglielmo coldly. "I will wed the Lady Griselda."

He looked at her, and she at him; they were the only two not dumb-struck by the words.

"My—son—the Duke of Rometia after me—wed—?" gasped old Andrea. "Son, her father is nothing. Look at him. Fifty thousand crowns hath he borrowed from one I know, and the debt is overdue. And—"

"I will wed her," says Guglielmo; upon which Pietro arose screaming like a maniac.

"Moreover," this latter cried, beating his breast with his fists, "she is betrothed to me—this very night was she betrothed to me; and thou art not the eldest son; and when the time comes for a succession, we shall see who is nothing—we shall see who is nothing! We—"

"Close me his mouth," says Andrea to one of his soldiers; and the man clapped his hand roughly over Pietro's lips.

Andrea sat down. Combing his beard with his fingers, he looked from Ugo to Griselda; from Griselda to Pietro, and from Pietro to your Highness' father; changed again, in the twinkling of an eye, from the old war-dog into the aged statesman; a terrible figure.

"What does the wench say of it?" he asked, without looking at her.

"I will wed Pietro," says Griselda forthwith.

Andrea nodded.

"And why?" says he.

"Because his state and my father's, joined, can overthrow Rometia when your Grace shall be dead; your younger son there will not be a match for their two brains, and moreover, Pietro as elder will have right on his side, and the Pope will support him."

"And thy father's creditors? For by that time, they—"

"They will aid him," says Griselda coolly, "because they will know that only out of your Duchy can their debts be paid."

Now the old Duke did look at her, and nodded. He looked at her, as she stood there, cold as ice, between her trembling father and her gagged betrothed, and he smiled at last.

"The lad hath chosen well," says he. "And thou'lt not wed him because he shall never be Duke?"

"Nay," says Griselda.

"With thee to help him, he would certes remain on the throne even under the assaults of the devil—who is not married," says old Andrea, combing his beard.

"Moreover, I am old, and a little weary of all this being torn between brothers."

He smiled slowly at Griselda, and as slowly drew from his belt the white staff he carried as signal of his rank and commandership.

"Call my herald," says he to a soldier, still staring Griselda in the eyes; and when the man came, he broke the white staff in two, and threw the pieces on the ground.

"Witness and proclaim," says old Andrea, "that I hereby resign and abdicate my throne, appointing my well-beloved son Guglielmo to my place and power, as Regent for me during my life, and to succeed me after my death."

"But, sire—" says the herald.

"Go, dog!" roars his master. "Go blow trumpet in the courtyard and proclaim!"

There was deathly silence in the hall until the first blast of the trumpet sounded outside; and then Andrea, seeming to wipe a tear out of one eye, reached for Griselda's hand, and dragged her over to Guglielmo. They looked at each other, like adversaries about to duel; and he looked at both of them approvingly.

"Now, mistress," he said. "How now?"

I was forgetting, amid all this chatter of old days—your Highness' demand was for news of Elisabetta Sismondi.

Ah, well, your Grace—after the Lady Griselda had consented to wed your Grace's father, since he was to be Duke, I saw my sweet betrothed of that same morning slip into the shadows of the banqueting hall's far end, and stand staring at Guglielmo with her astonishing blue eyes; they seemed to show forth their color even through the dark; and I approached her, and without hope, I told her that since Felipe Nero was dead, I should doubtless either be hanged or made Captain of the Guard, in which latter event we could marry.

Winter had come upon the deep sea of her regard, however, as she looked at me now.

"It is not to be," she said. "I go to Rometia with Messer Guglielmo."

"He is to wed our Griselda," says I, with my hand on my poniard. "How goest thou there?"

"As a still-room maid, marry," says Elisabetta, staring me icily in the face. "What else?"

So we gazed at each other for some minute or two; or century or two; some such thing.

Afterwards, I turned back to speak with your Grace's father—my hand still on my poniard; but he was just marching from the hall with his father on one side, and eight cavalrymen with drawn swords about him.

I remember that two or three of the candles on Count Ugo's table—by which the old man still sat weeping—had guttered in their sconces, and their dead smoke was curling upward—

IV

I AM drunk, my Lord, drunk! Why should I disguise it, why should I be ashamed of it? What drunkenness of theirs have your Lordship's forbears disguised from me; of which appetite have they been ashamed before Luigi Caradosso?

Your Grace has demanded news of Elisabetta Sismondi. I have your Grace's warrant to write it.

Then—after I had ridden out of the Castle of Monterosso, as I did that same night, I made for the North, and joined a band of *condottiere* under Francesco Jacopo della Maremme; I served a year, being in eighteen pitched battles in Romagna, and twenty-seven skirmishes; but at last, having recovered from all my wounds—which I had sought, like a poor young fool—I came down with a pestilent malaria; near died in a monastery hospital, and at last found myself some ten miles from Rometia, without sword, armor or a groat.

I had spent three nights under hedges, quaking with my fever, before I remembered your Highness' father's message which he had sent after me—that I could be Captain of his Guard whenever I should wish; and then it was a week before I could bring myself to seek the palace. This is a matter for pride with me, your Grace. Lucifer fell from Heaven in one moment; my fall took seven days—

The old Duke Andrea was dead, meantime; Guglielmo had succeeded, strong in an alliance with Venice, and supported by funds from the Republic of Florence, which then was the ally of all who could come borrowing a-horse.

"Welcome, Luigi," I recall he said to me, when I was shown in shivering and burning in my rags. "Welcome, Luigi! God or the devil hath sent thee at the right time!" And then to the servant who had brought

me. "Go seek the Duchess, and tell her maids I would speak with her here."

Then he said:

"Luigi Caradosso, where hast thou been? Up in the North, fighting, I heard some time agone?"

I nodded at him—still feeling, such was my inexperience, somewhat inclined to murder.

"Hast thou found much profit in it, Luigi?"

"Nay," says I," since your Grace took away the profit of my youth, nothing has profited me."

He waved that away with a hand wristed in ermine.

"She was not built for a wife," says he. "A Duke should marry a politician, Luigi *mio*, and a soldier a tavern-keeper's daughter with a little money. Dost thou remember how we fought on the catapult platform?"

I was so weak that the tears came to my eyes.

"Aye."

"Then remember it a little longer," says your Highness' father, as the Duchess was announced from the curtains, "and shalt be Captain of my Guard. Bid the Duchess enter."

She did enter, with stewards bowing to the right and to the left—four of them; and four maids following behind her, two holding her train; much the same as when I had last seen her at Monterosso, but prouder and colder and now, it seemed, angry to boot.

She did not know me at all, alas! so I had changed.

"Withdraw!" says Guglielmo, settling his robe over his shoulders and starting to pace up and down; and though Griselda glared at her maids as if to bid them stay, withdraw they did—hastily.

"And now, thou," says Guglielmo, pausing suddenly, and with hands on his ermine breast-lapels, staring at his Duchess. "Touching this affair of thy taking Elisabetta Sismondi in thy train to the country-house."

"I will not!" snarls Griselda, half-crouching at him.

"Wilt not!"

"Nay, as I have told thee before! I have negotiated for thee with the Duke of Venice, I have spoken in thy behalf with the bankers of Florence, but this—"

Now she remembered herself of my presence, and stopped, and on the instant, your Highness' father went over, and gripped her by the wrists, and twisted them until she screamed, and forced her to her knees.

"Wilt not, thou she-ass, thou mule, thou Sahara?" he shouted. "Wilt not, to me? Thou'lt depart tomorrow, and live in one wing of the house while Elisabetta hath the rest of it, or I'll have thy nose cut off and thee burned, foul thing! I overheard talk between thee and my brother, a year ago at Monterosso! Here is my witness of what I heard—here in the flesh—Luigi Caradosso, lieutenant in thy father's guard!"

And he told her what she had said to Pietro of the Two Towers, and what he had said to her, that night a year ago; more clearly than I remembered it; and with brutal words that I would never have said to any woman.

He was the model of a Prince—

I became Captain of his Guard that night, and the next day commanded the files of each side of the great gates, when the Duchess Griselda rode out with her train.

I strove not to see Elisabetta Sismondi as the tail of the procession went by; but her blue eyes—so blue!—sought me out as her palfrey passed, with herself all huddled up in swathings, and I dropped my sword, and pretended to shiver with my disease, and said the heat had stunned me; and was in the guard-room, drinking wine, when the great gates closed.

She had regretted, your Grace!

It was her eyes showed it—

ENDORSEMENT

THIS old —— Caradosso, after all my pains, hath written nothing more, even drunk, than was common rumor in the Duchy; fortunately, the death of my cousin, Guglielmo II, by a fall from his horse relieveth me of necessity to seek further information.

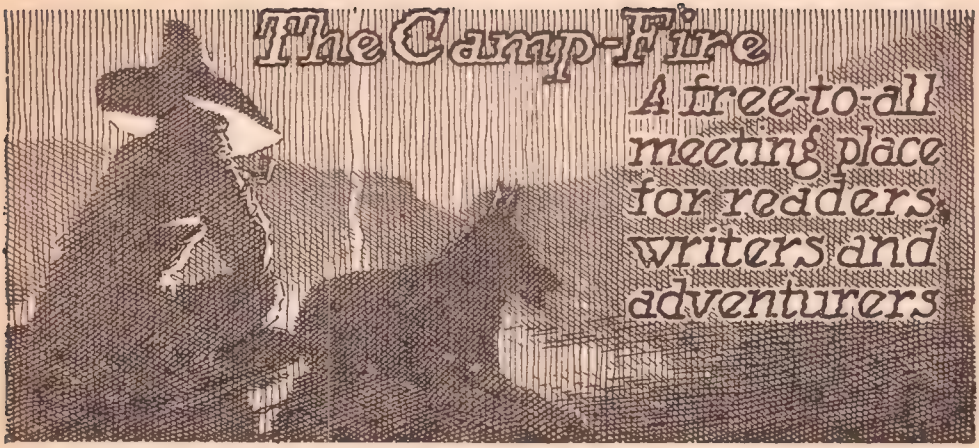
Let it be remembered, in case children of his should seek to take the succession from mine, that my cousin—whom may God receive into His peace—had *remarkable blue eyes*.

(Signed)

PIETRO (Seal)

Duke of Rometia.

Witnessed: Salvador, Fogazzo; *Secretaries*.



Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The *spirit* of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

NATURALLY, in the circumstances his name is not published with his letter, nor even his correct initials. To what extent are we following in the footsteps of Rome, employing foreigners, who may or may not be all right, just as Rome came to depend upon her mercenaries and foreigners in general as her defenders?

After reading over the different questions and answers in regard to the Reds in our Army and Navy, and hearing the request for any one to step up and say his say, if any, I have come to where I must speak or forever hold my peace.

It is too bad that I can not let my name be published at the end of this note, but you must know that my days of freedom would be numbered if I let them at Headquarters know my name.

HAVE you ever stopped to think of the amount of money offered to any man enlisting in the U. S. Service? The sum of money is $21 a month, less $.20 for hospital fee.

Now consider the sum of money in the amount of daily wage, which is $.6933, for a young, able-bodied American youth of eighteen years of age.

The result you get and we get, is—who is fool enough to work for $.6933 a day in these times? Answer is, not many. But we must still keep up a show of an Army, Navy and Marine Corps, and we do. People coming from other lands arrive in the U. S. and after picking up a few words of English—as we speak it—learn that a discharge from either the Army, Navy or Marines gives them the right to claim their second papers and become a grand voter in a great country. The result again is that they flock to the U. S. Service. We must teach them English and teach them trades and all kinds of other things, and one grand job that is.

I could go on and tell you some more things along

that line," but enough is enough. The service is O. K. and I can lick the man who states otherwise or go down trying. Congress is to blame and not the Army, Navy or Marines. Give us the money and we can get real American-born fighters.—C. B. A.

FOR many years we have from time to time debated the question first raised by Edgar Young, "What is the spirit of adventure, biologically considered?" Now, it seems, Post Sargent of our writers' brigade has appealed to Dame Adventure herself to address us personally and give her pedigree and the derivation of her name. Our thanks to him. It is high time we gained knowledge of the facts.

Hanover, New Hampshire.

Some fifteen years, isn't it, that *Adventure* has asked at intervals the meaning of its name? I have been interested in the discussions. It has seemed to me that often a restrictive definition was given. Such should not be the case. Practically every definition offered was correct, according to my opinion; all were wrong, since they arrived at their conclusion by elimination instead of inclusion.

I forward a statement by Adventure herself. While working on the series material, I stopped long enough to set down the enclosed. Philogical, historical, psychological—they represent a point of view, if nothing else. It would seem that *Adventure* readers would like to know just how the word originated and how it got its present meaning.—POST SARGENT.

MY PEDIGREE, BY DAME ADVENTURE

AS TOLD TO POST SARGENT

I am Adventure. Today I laughed. I overheard a *Mayflower* descendant and the scion of a Norman baron disputing the ancientry of their lineage. The *Mayflower* folk and the descendants of William the Conqueror are but upstarts of yesterday, even though my own ancestors were of their company.

MY FAMILY tree has its roots in remote antiquity although our name was not then Adventure. We are, indeed, the oldest of the companions of man. Eden and Adam knew us, although we went unnamed, being symbolized by an apple, a serpent, a flaming sword; for in the twilight hours of the human race all was imputed to sin that sprung from the strivings of human nature. Noah and Jonah and Joshua knew us, though our name is hidden in allegory and parable; sanctified in tales of an ark, a "big fish's belly," a sun at standstill.

My first ancestors went forth into the world with Adam and Eve. They begot lustily and scattered in countless forms to the ends of the earth.

There is no "Burke's Peerage," no "Royal Almanach" of those primitive days. Else our name in its earliest forms would be found allied to those of the chiefs and leaders of prehistoric man.

Yesterday the scientists unearthed the skull of a primordial man: Pithecanthropos, Heidleberg, Piltdown, or Cro-Magnon—I forget which. Nor does it import, since such lapses of time are as nothing in the face of man's full age. With the skull lay a stone club; close by, the monstrous skeleton of a megatherium. The sands of a half-million years had hardened into rock above their bones. Above them, where they fought and died, still hovered the impalpable aura of one of my forefathers—Hazard, Daring, Ambition, Action-Urge—one from the much-intermarried clans whose most famous progeny is myself, Adventure.

IN THOSE early days, as now, we were the spirit that called to men's shackled natures, their longings, their instincts. Since we could not be acknowledged by our name (for man's nature was hedged in by fears and tabus), we were shrouded in superstitions and mythologies. Nimrod, Scylla and Charybdis, the Midgard Serpent, the Golden Fleece and their like, were but ikons for admiration or fear set up by priests, in order that our appeal to the virile might be controlled and formalized in fear.

The boundaries of the world retreated. China waxed and waned. Egypt became great, then died. Ancient Greece flourished and perished. Wherever men roamed or foregathered, there was found one of my forbears, inciting ever to venture and exploit, that the horizons of knowledge might be pushed back and man be freed from the fetters of dread. And this, by playing on the human heart-strings—the chords of Fame, of Mystery, of Human Inquisitiveness, of Restlessness. For the nomadic Quidnuncs of this world are the true founders of Progress.

Still we had no name, or many—and not the true one.

AND then came Rome. Its armies devastated and blighted, but its culture swept the Western World. A world-speech that sped through Italy, Gaul, Iberia, to distant Roumania and Britain. Men then found tongue to formulate for modernity in lasting form their abstract ideas. (*Dame Adventure doubtless has in mind, throughout, the wonderful philosophic poem of Lucretius, "De Rerum Natura"—"On the Nature of Things"—the epitome of man's struggle and race against the shifting shadow-shapes of human superstition and ignorance. The Latin word* res, *"thing"—of feminine gender as in* res publica-republic—*was used as substitute for almost any other noun, especially in the abstract. But of this Dame Adventure speaks.—Post Sargent.*)

It was then that my name took shape. Slowly, hesitantly at first, since men long failed to recognize the warring gods of the inner self. Staid Respectability and plump Complacency, whose shibboleth was "Appearances and safety first;" at odds with Nonconformity and reckless Ideal, that counselled the Rainbow End and the Quest of the Endless Trail.

Adventurus, the Latins began; "about to arrive," referring to any matter about to happen.

Then *res adventura*, "the thing that looms, the impending event."

At last, *adventura!* A word alone, now feminine—a noun. Cousin to the three Fates that draw and spin and snip the threads of human destiny. The thing in the lap of the gods. The hazard in the cast of the die.

AN AVID world seized on the word. The Romanic tongues transformed it to their uses; and Norman France sped it to England in the wake of the armies of William the Conqueror. (*French*

aventure; *Italian* avventura; *Spanish and Portuguese* aventura. *Later the Teutonic and Slavic-German* Abenteuer *supplanting the indigenous* ritterliches Wagnis; *Danish* eventyr; *Swedish* äfventyr; *Russian* avantjurist.—*Post Sargent*).

Knightly deeds and heroic exploits were done in my name. The depths of the seas were peopled with my dead, and Valhalla was expressly created as their resting-place. I called and nations moved; the "wandering of the peoples" was of my handiwork; Attila and Alaric were my puppets.

New expressions soon centered about my newly-discovered name, since men now recognized my guiding finger in the mutability of fortune. (*English* peradventure, *"perhaps"*; at all adventures, *"come what may;" French* à l'aventure, *"haphazard;"* pierre d'aventure, *English* aventurine, *an artificial stone discovered by chance;* diseuse de bonne aventure, *"fortune-teller,"* mal d'aventure, *"disease" known to us as the* whitlow; *etc.—P.S.*)

I personified the hazards of commerce and speculation.

(Bill of adventure, *French* contrat à la grosse aventure, *a commercial document agreeing that goods carried in bottoms are at risk of shipper. The Russian borrowed word* avantjurist *"adventurer," signifies primarily a commercial speculator; in the 18th century it was specially applied to the heroes of the countless robinsonades, romances in imitation of Robinson Crusoe. Interesting to note is the expression Merchant Adventurers, the title of a staid English commercial company of 1406-1634. "Several local associations of merchants still exist under this name."—P.S.*)

I am both the abstract and the concrete of life, being the force that urges and resultant exploit. I am the symbol of repressed spontaneity; also the written record of human achievement. Sometimes the mystic—the searcher for the Holy Grail; sometimes the idealist, knight of lost causes and redresser of wrongs. I camp on the trail of History; I sleep in the tent of Travel.

I am the theme of much of the world's great literature. Charlemagne and the "Song of Roland," King Arthur and his Round Table, Robin Hood, Marco Polo, Don Quixote, Cellini, Villon—creator and creation draw from me the breath of life. (*With her accustomed modesty, Dame Adventure neglects to state that she is the soul of the Epic; especially the French* chansons de geste, *songs of deeds and* romans d'aventure, *romances of adventure, that captivated Europe for over two centuries.—P.S.*)

From the Bagdad of Haroun al-Raschid to Bagdad on the Subway, I have been and am the *res adventura*, the "looming event," of human experience. Ancient fable and folklore, medieval tale of chivalry, modern novel and drama and opera draw largely their inspiration from me.

THIS modern archer questions some of the feats attributed to the archers of old. It is to be remembered, however, that in the days when the bow was a chief weapon of war archers were trained from early childhood.

How about a bullet-proof vest *vs.* a modern arrow? Comrade Rounsevelle has the arrow. Who has the bullet-proof vest?

New Orleans, Louisiana.

Friend Alfred Buehl draweth a long bow, forsooth, in the issue of August 10th, when he speaks of an experienced archer having ten arrows in the air at one time, especially war arrows. Maurice Thompson claims that no man could get over three, and after years of practise I have been able to get up only four at one time. These of course are hunting arrows, drawn from the quiver as shot. This is the best record I know of, using regular equipment and methods. There are probably better records than this, as I am not especially quick by nature, and I would like to hear about them, if any readers can give further information.

You will think I am forgetting Dr. Pope's record of seven, but this could hardly be called straight shooting, as he used special flight arrows, held them all in his bow hand at once, used a special release, and in addition to all this, Dr. Pope is a gifted slight-of-hand performer. I think it is safe to say that ten arrows in the air at once is almost a physical impossibility, and I think it never has and never will be accomplished.

A FOUR-HUNDRED-YARD flight shot with the long bow is probably in the same category, as the extreme range of the long bow is just about 300 yards, with the lightest of flight shafts. The weight of the bow, when over 63 pounds, seems to make very little difference, as there is a limit to the speed with which a bow will re-act. Even our worthy Powell has kept very close to this mark with his 105-pound "Skullbiter."

Frequently in the parks, we get about 200 yards apart and shoot blunt arrows at each other. These are easily dodged, in flights of one, two or three, but when four are coming at you, or more, it is almost impossible to get out of their way. Mr. Buehl is certainly right about this.

In reply to his statement about the hitting power, and also about the invention of the long bow, let him look in Xenophon's "Anabasis," about the encounter with the Carducian bowmen. They used long bows, too, and arrows about 35 inches in length, and their method was to draw with both hands, lying on their backs, with the bows across their feet. Quoting from memory, I believe Xenophon says "—and such an arrow would pierce shield, breast-plate, and the soldier beneath—" I forget the length of the bow, but believe it was about six or seven feet.

Our fellow Archer R. C. Thurwachter, at Syracuse, writes us in today's mail about our new hunting arrow. "I shot the one that you gave me through an inch pine board this morning with a forty-pound lemonwood at about 20 feet." There is no game on this continent so thick, nor no armor so strong that it can not be pierced, and usually through and through with a well sped cloth-yard shaft, and a seventy-pound bow. By the way, most authorities say that the cloth-yard is 27 or 28 inches, and not 36. Arrows today, for men, are 28 inches, as a rule.—PHILLIP ROUNSEVELLE.

P.S.—I think the new bullet-proof vest could be penetrated and would like to try it.—P. R.

AND here are the makings of a small riot. Rally, gun-cranks and ordinary hunters, to repel an attack! The following is from a greeting sent by comrade Rounsevelle to archers gathered for the tournament of the National Archery Association at Rome, New York:

Archery age-old is still new to most, and we the faithful are a mere handful, and not a single one to spare, for we have before us our devoir as fixed and as noble as that of the Yeoman at Crecy.

Save American Game!

Hunt With the Bow!

It may seem strange to ask you to save our wild things by killing them but, friend Archer, there is no other way. The murderous shot-gun and the high-power rifle have taken the sportmanship out of hunting, and have left mere butchery.

Our Bison are gone, our Swans are gone, and all of our other furred and feathered friends are fast going, too, unless we save them. A handful of staunch, determined Archers can do it. Pope, Compton and Young have blazed the trail, have set a fine precedent. Their exploits are known the country over.

The rapidly growing sentiment against the automatic shot-gun will spread to all its foul-mouthed kindred, and we may see soon the day that woods and field, forest and stream no longer re-echo with cruel, blastings, lingering slaughter. When the whispering shaft brings quick painless death, and those who kill have fairly earned their game. If you who shoot in Tournament today can bring one friend to use a bow afield, and next year each of you bring each another, in twelve short years half a million bowmen will roam the glades as in days of old, with honest eyes, and merciful hearts, taking life sparingly.

And all the silent woodland folk increasingly abundant everywhere will thank you.—ROUNSEVELLE.

I make confession myself. I can't get up much enthusiasm personally over killing birds and the smaller animals with shot-guns or modern high-power rifles. For me it is about as sporting as a bull-fight and with even less risk. Killing for food or killing "varmints," yes, but I might as well be honest and admit that when I contrast a hunter and his gun with what he's slain with it—a dozen or so little quail, for example, well, it looks sort of odd.

I'm not campaigning against modern hunting or hunters, nor even condemning them. Just stating my own reaction, which isn't of importance and certainly has no backing of principles and ethics. I don't happen to enjoy killing helpless, inoffensive birds and animals, that's all. Any ethics of mine on the subject are low, for I don't hesitate to eat said helpless, inoffensive birds and animals killed by some one else and I get a large kick out of killing helpless, inoffensive fish—yes, and by heck I don't hesitate to go after 'em with plugs and triple hooks, which is about on a par with using a modern, highly developed shot-gun for killing a quail. As I grow older I begin to have qualms over thus pitting man's twentieth century's inventions against poor darned fish that I don't need for eating, but the qualms aren't big enough to make me stop fishing.

Maybe you're low, modern hunters, but so am I, so let's don't quarrel about it.

But killing only such game as could be knocked over with bow and arrow, that would make the contest between man and little bird a bit evener and more sporting. I've tried bow and arrow enough to know that in my own case it would be a very, very sporting proposition on my part, with the odds very heavily in favor of the little birds.

THIS from a letter from Leonard H. Nason of our writers' brigade, enclosing two photographs he had taken:

Biarritz, France.

How the —— they'll ever have peace in Europe I don't know. After every war the winning side rubs it into the losers, so that the losers just save up for revenge and then the war is on all over again. For instance, look at this pile of German soldiers' headstones. Why not leave the poor devils alone? The French won't let the bodies go back to Germany, and won't let the poor devils lie in peace. I don't know where these headstones come from. You see piles of them in old German sectors.

The other picture is a house in the Argonne that I was once in. The holes in the front are German sniper bullets. Man, they kept us interested. It looks just the same as ever. They've begun to fix it—though.—STEAMER.

THIS letter from S. B. H. Hurst came to me along with the manuscript of his story appearing in this issue:

Rolling Bay, Washington.

Do you remember—long time ago — "The Receipt?" About *Bill Driver*, who had escaped from the Andamans, but who went back to warn the garrison, and who died—taking with him a "receipt" from the Chief Commissioner which showed he had paid the government the debt he owed it. I mention this because here is a story of the same locality—Burma—and because *Cameron* (I could tell you many true tales about *Cameron*) gets into it, with others.—S. B. H. HURST.

THERE seems to be more and more scientific interest in the secrets of the past whose keys lie in certain parts of Central America. The secrets are not easy to unlock, but there are plenty of keys among which to search for the master key. As witness this paragraph out of a letter from A. W. Payne, Department of Middle American Research, The Tulane University of Louisiana. You will remember our hearing from him while he was in the field.

Washington, D. C.

There was nothing spectacular in my doings there; the object of the season being to go over the field and lay out plans for our coming years' programs. The fact that the northern section of Honduras, particularly the Ulua Valley section, is literally covered with ancient mounds and other culture evidences, is well known, I imagine. One can not, actually, scratch the soil for a few feet anywhere without coming across pottery, either whole or shards, of the most beautiful character, flint, jade and other stone objects, a long list of clay objects, and even a small amount of gold. What a story that land holds. May it be told soon.—A. W. Payne.

THIS was a personal letter to me, its writer giving his name and address. Since it contained a criticism of one of our writers we sent it to said writer as per usual custom when a criticism contains something the author should see—for his interest or to give him a chance to defend himself. The criticism and Mr. Coburn's reply make interesting reading so I'm passing them on. Since the criticizing comrade didn't write for publication his name is omitted.

Vancouver, B. C.

I have just finished the story by Mr. Coburn and must say that it is one of the most improbable ones (bar some of your "Off the trail" stories) that you have ever printed. I mean "Freeze Out" in the Sept. 20th. In the first place *why will* authors persist in making some grotesque personality quicker than a bullet from the hand of a trained and ready man, also an exceedingly "peeved" one? Secondly, if you ever lived in bunkhouses as I have done, you will know that there is quite a radiance from a red-hot stove quite sufficient to show a dark form coming toward you even if the candle is blown out. Thirdly, when you are worked up to battle-anger it will take a terriffic wrench and not a glancing blow to knock a gun out of a man's hand, as guns are made to hold and you would subconsciously tighten your grasp, not loosen it, when a blow is coming your way. Fourthly—and you can try it yourself, if you have done any shooting, that is at night, 'specially after "possum"—if a dim light goes out and you are staring fixedly at a mark, you can almost automatically hit it or scare it to death anyhow. I know the idea is to spin out the story, but it sounds like the dickens to the man who knows and you have a big bunch of readers who do. It spoils the story for them and personally I never saw the "Fritz" that would make any funny movements when a resolute man he *knew* to be a good shot had the drop on him, and believe me, there were some pretty tough birds among the Prussian Guards. Ask any one who has been up against them.

Understand, Mr. Hoffman, this is a friendly criticism.

Now for my second kick. You sir are drifting awfully near to love stories, in some of your yarns; only so far you have kind of ruined the story by chopping off the conventional happy ending so us poor devils can not hold you responsible, but please cut it out. If I want to get girl stories there are literally dozens of magazines on the market that specialize in nothing else but, so many in fact that they are cloying.

AS TO the complaint about an increase in woman or love interest in our stories, there has been no change of policy and I think that if the comrade will compare the issues of the past year with those of the year preceding he will find they average up about the same in this respect. No magazine can "balance" every one of its issues perfectly. Stories are not like groceries; you can't just step out and buy a particular brand any moment you chance to need it. And there are scores of factors that must be considered in rounding out a well-balanced issue. Especially if there are thirty-six issues a year, you will have to attain your balance over a considerable period instead of hoping to perfect it in each issue.

Among the other factors necessary to a balance are: length of stories; tragedy, comedy, pathos; sea *vs.* land; foreign *vs.* American and Canadian; tropics, temperate zones, arctic; Europe, Asia, Africa, Australia, Latin America; subdivisions under these divisions; best *vs.* second-best stories; varying degrees of physical adventure; Western, Southern, Eastern, Northern stories; general "feel" and "tone" of stories, and so on for quite a while more.

And if you *did* succeed in balancing the issue in every single one of these respects you probably couldn't use it. For before you can hand it over to the printer you have to consider your various items in relation to the issue just preceding it—several issues, indeed, on quite a few points. For example, if three issues back was a Robert Simpson story and you had one in the issue you were laying out you'd probably take it out because you were running stories by one

author too close together. On the other hand, if there were no story of his in the issue, but one three issues back and they both belonged to a series that you happened to be spacing three issues apart, you'd probably take out a story in order to get a Robert Simpson story in and, having got it in, you'd find it knocked the balance sky high on several scores and have to do the whole darned thing over. Incidentally, you don't space all series at the same distance apart, nor even the same series all the time.

Having at last got your issue balanced in itself and also in relation to past issues, you still probably can't use it. For you haven't chosen your items with careful eye to your stock of stories on hand. You may for example, have used two or three sea stories when you had so few in stock that you can't afford to use more than one. Or you may have used only one or two when you have so many in stock that you must be using them up to balance your stock for future issues.

I've talked a lot of words but, believe me, I haven't even scratched the surface. Balancing an issue isn't so simple as it seems. If any of you think differently, come on in and balance one for me. I'm willing.

So if a few issues fairly close together seem to run too strong or too weak on one of the many factors involved, don't go up in the air and jump to the conclusion that the magazine's policy has been changed.

Also, be sure it wasn't your own mood or some other factor personal to yourself, rather than an actual change in the magazine, that gave you the impression.

When we change the magazine's policy we tell you about it. The older readers know that we generally consult them in advance before making any change.

Now for Mr. Coburn's reply to the criticism above:

Carmel, California.

Will try to take up your points in turn as you mention them in your letter. Before going into that, however, want to stand on my legs and tell you and any one else "who knows," as you put it, that when it comes to gun-play of any sort, rough-house scrapping, and that sort of thing, I've seen plenty of it and have seen men that were just as tough, just as quick on the trigger, and just as game at the show-down as your Prussian Guards. I've packed a gun since I was a kid, lived in a country that held some —— tough hombres, and have experienced the sensation of looking down the barrel of a .45. I've been in some tight jams, have seen men killed, witnessed some mighty pretty free-for-alls from on top and from underneath. Therefore, partner, I figure that I savvy just as well as you or "those who know" how men react under certain conditions. I'm not a pilgrim or tenderfoot as you seem to infer in your letter.

YOU say "Why do authors persist in making some grotesque personality quicker than a bullet from the hand of a trained and ready man also an exceedingly 'peeved' one?"

My answer is this. *I've seen it done.* I have seen a man go up against a bigger man who had the drop, knowing that this big man would rather kill him than anything in the world. The smaller man, knowing the big gent wanted to kill him, ducked as the big man shot. The bullet cut his scalp. The big man hit him over the head with his gun and the smaller man clinched with him. Dazed by the blow, underneath on the floor of the saloon, he fought while the big man emptied his gun at his head. His face and eyes were filled with blood from the scalp-wound; he was dazed by the blow he had received. Yet he held the big man's gun-arm and whenever the big man pulled the trigger, he jerked that arm enough to send the bullet into the floor. I can tell you the name of the town, the saloon, the exact date of this scrap, and prove it by twenty men.

ANOTHER point of yours was this. That a man, a tough man at that, would not tackle a man who had the drop on him. You name your Prussian Guards as examples. Mister, did you ever meet up with a real tough Texan? Well, to prove my point, during this scrap I've just mentioned, the big man's partner, a man who had the rep. of being a hard man (let me add here that the big man was a deputy sheriff and his partner was Justice of the Peace in this little cow-town and mining-camp back in Montana) this partner was holding off the crowd with an automatic while Mister Deputy was trying to do his killing.

Outside, sitting on his horse was a gent named Jake, foreman for the cowman who was battling with the deputy. Jake hears the row and breaks into the door. He sees the situation. He is *unarmed.* Get that!

"Stand back or I'll kill you!" bawls the Justice, and his automatic is sure ready.

"Kill and be —— to you!" says Jake and he wades in. The Justice empties his gun at a twenty-five foot range, shoot's his partner in the foot, and drills some neat holes in the floor as Jake kicks the big deputy in the jaw.

I can give you the names of the men involved in this scrap, if you like. Also the names of men who saw it.

GOING back to your "secondly." This concerns the radiating power of a red-hot stove. There are stoves and stoves. I grant you that a round-bellied heating stove in a lumberjack camp or a cow ranch *bunkhouse* would give off some light. But this cabin in the yarn was not a bunkhouse. The stove was a cook-stove. Men on the dodge don't pack around big heating stoves. Common sense will tell the men who know the life portrayed in my story that the stove was a light-weight sheet-iron stove that, red hot, would give off but darn little

light. A three-foot radius would well cover its glow. I've spent a few nights in bunkhouses myself. Also plenty long nights in cabins at line camps where the stove was of the variety I mention. The damper would be closed. The firebox gives off no light. You'd find a faint glow from the *top* of this little flat round-up stove.

NOW about knocking a gun from a man's hand. A sharp *downward* blow along the end of the barrel of a single action .45 will knock the gun from a fairly tight grip. You say the man's grip on that gun would be subconsciously tight. Mebby yes. Mebby no. Depends on the man who holds the weapon. Just tried the experiment with a big man of powerful build, an ex-colonel of the A.E.F., once major under Pancho Villa. A man who savvies shooting-irons. He outweighs me fifty pounds. His grip on the gun was tight. One sharp knock sent the gun through a window that will cost me two and a half to replace. We also discovered that a sharp blow on the inside of the wrist would loosen the ordinary grip on the gun. A blow, not a wrench, understand.

The light goes out. (Your next point.) "You are staring fixedly at a mark." *But* a "possum" is not a human being. Get the idea? More than one hold-up man has made a getaway by shooting out the lights of the saloon or gambling-hall he stuck up. Perhaps it "sounds like the dickens to the man who knows," partner. The question is, just what is the extent of this knowledge? Possum hunting and man hunting are different trades. Perhaps I'm wrong but I'm inclined to think that I know as much about my subject as the next man, and I was born and raised in the country I write about. I've bunked with killers, ridden with posses, and darn me if I don't believe I come mighty near knowing whereof I speak when I put it into a yarn. Until some one proves me a liar (I speak plainly) I maintain I'm somewhere near right.

YOU claim "Freeze Out" is one of the most improbable stories *Adventure* ever printed. If you can name any further points than those I have taken up to the best of my ability, let's have 'em. I might tell you that every one of those characters is taken from real life. The *Kid* (I reckon that's the gent that you call grotesque) I took from the character of a boy who died in the war. Died with a lapful of empty shells and seven Germans lying dead near him.

Wingy was a one-armed gent who could kick a cigaret out of your mouth and never miss a jig step. A sandy haired Scotchman who could whip any man in the Little Rockies and there were some mighty tough men in those camps.

The other characters are also taken from life. They have been changed into outlaws and the story is purely fiction. *But* I know facts that are more improbable than this bit of fiction. Ever read the history of Billy the Kid, Butch Cassidy, the battles along the Pecos and Canadian Rivers down south? How Billy the Kid killed his guard, J. W. Bell, at Lincoln? How Harvey Logan broke jail in Tennessee? Improbable? I'll tell a man! Cow-country history is full of improbable incidents. Your Prussian Guards didn't crowd a man covering 'em with a gun but I'm here to tell the world that the old-time outlaw of the West was a different breed from the Prussian Guards. History backs me up. Montana history. Texas history. Cow-country history, partner. The lives of such men as Jim Bridger, Ewen Cameron, Wild Bill, Jim East, or any other well-known rider of frontier trails. Their lives are plumb full of improbabilities. Outlaws such as the James boys, Cole Younger, members of the Wild Bunch, Henry Plummer. Fiction is tame in comparison to some of their stunts.

I think this covers all the points you mention. Will be glad to explain anything else regarding this story, privately or publicly, at any time. Can back any of my statements with concrete proof.—WALTER J. COBURN.

I've happened to see quite a few letters from readers who knew at first hand many of the incidents in Mr. Coburn's stories, some who also knew Mr. Coburn and had ridden the range with him. It happens that within the week I read a letter from one of you who recognized the characters in that story, gave Mr. Coburn the latest news of them and referred back to some of the main incidents of the tale as things the two of them had known in real life. He hadn't any doubts—just acted as if he had been reading history. Nor has any other one of you, except as above, ever even whispered a doubt of Mr. Coburn's "knowing his stuff," and there are certainly a lot of you who are a whole lot equipped to catch up any slips.

INDEXES by volume for most of the volumes of *Adventure* back to about 1912 are on hand and will be sent free to any reader who will pay the necessary postage. Allow about one-half cent per index for postage and be sure to specify the volumes for which you wish the indexes when you write. And remember that the supply of some of the indexes is very low and may be exhausted by the time your letter is received.

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Lost Trails, for finding missing relatives and friends, runs in alternate issues from "Old Songs That Men Have Sung."

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A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the section in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert may give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelop and *full* postage, *not attached,* are enclosed. (See footnote at bottom of page.) Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union. Be sure that the issuing office stamps the coupon in the left-hand circle.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose section it seems to belong.**

1. The Sea Part 1 American Waters
BERIAH BROWN, Coupeville, Wash. Ships, seamen and shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, yachting, small-boat sailing; commercial fisheries of North America; marine bibliography of U. S.; fishing-vessels of the North Atlantic and Pacific banks. (*See next section.*)

2. The Sea Part 2 British Waters
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, care *Adventure.* Seamanship, navigation, old-time sailorizing, ocean-cruising, etc. Questions on the sea, ships and men local to the British Empire go to Captain Dingle, not Mr. Brown.

3. The Sea Part 3 Statistics of American Shipping
HARRY E. RIESEBERG, Apartment 347-A, Kew Gardens, Washington, D. C. Historical records, tonnages, names and former names, dimensions, services, power, class, rig, builders, present and past ownerships, signals, etc., of all vessels of the American Merchant Marine and Government vessels in existence over five gross tons in the United States, Panama and the Philippines, and the furnishing of information and records of vessels under American registry as far back as 1760.

4. Islands and Coasts Part 1 Islands of Indian and Atlantic Oceans; the Mediterranean; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits
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5. Islands Part 2 Haiti, Santo Domingo, Porto Rico, Virgin and Jamaica Groups
CHARLES BELL EMERSON, Adventure Cabin, Los Gatos, Calif. Languages, mining, minerals, fishing, sugar, fruit and tobacco production.

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14. Japan
GRACE P. T. KNUDSON, Castine, Me. Commerce, politics, people, customs, history, geography, travel, agriculture, art, curios.

15. Asia Part 1 Arabia, Persia, India, Tibet, Burma, Western China, Borneo
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28. Asia Minor
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29. Bulgaria, Roumania
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34. Germany, Czecho-Slovakia, Austria, Poland
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40. Mexico Part 1 Northern
J. W. WHITEAKER, 1505 W. 10th St., Austin, Tex. Border States of old Mexico—Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas. Minerals, lumbering, agriculture, travel, customs, topography, climate, inhabitants, hunting, history, industries.

41. Mexico Part 2 Southern; and Lower California
C R MAHAFFEY, Box 304, San José, Calif. Lower California; Mexico south of a line from Tampico to Mazatlan. Mining, agriculture, topography, travel, hunting, lumbering, history, inhabitants, business and general conditions.

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(Editor to be appointed.)

57. Western U. S. Part 4 Mont. and the Northern Rocky Mountains.
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64. Middle Western U. S. Part 5 Great Lakes
H. C. GARDNER, 3302 Daisy Ave., Cleveland, Ohio. Seamanship, navigation, courses and distances, reefs and shoals lights and landmarks, charts; laws, fines, penalties; river navigation.

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HOWARD A. SHANNON, care of *Adventure*. Motor-boat equipment and management. Oystering, crabbing, eeling, black bass, pike, sea-trout, croakers; general fishing in tidal waters. Trapping and trucking on Chesapeake Bay. Water fowl and upland game in Maryland and Virginia. Early history of Delaware, Virginia and Maryland.

67. Eastern U. S. Part 3 Marshes and Swamplands of the Atlantic Coast from Philadelphia to Jacksonville
HOWARD A. SHANNON, care of *Adventure*. Okefinokee and Dismal, Okranoke and the Marshes of Glynn; Croatan Indians of the Carolinas. History, traditions, customs, hunting, modes of travel, snakes.

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WILLIAM R. BARBOUR, care of *Adventure*. Alleghanies, Blue Ridge, Smokies, Cumberland Plateau, Highland Rim. Topography, climate, timber, hunting and fishing, automobiling, national forests, general information.

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DR. G. E. HATHORNE, 70 Main St., Bangor, Me. For all territory *west* of the Penobscot River. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits, supplies.

71. Eastern U. S. Part 7 Eastern Maine
H. B. STANWOOD, East Sullivan, Me. For all territory *east* of the Penobscot River. Hunting, fishing, canoeing, mountaineering, guides; general information.

72. Eastern U. S. Part 8 Vt., N. H., Conn., R. I. and Mass.
HOWARD R. VOIGHT, 108 Hobart St., New Haven, Conn. Fishing, hunting, travel, roads; business conditions, history.

73. Eastern U. S. Part 9 New Jersey
(Editor to be appointed).

74. Eastern U. S. Part 10 Maryland
LAWRENCE EDMUND ALLEN, 201 Bowery Ave., Frostburg, Md. Mining, touring, summer resorts, historical places, general information.

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DONALD MCNICOL, 132 Union Road, Roselle Park, N. J. Telegraphy, telephony, history, broadcasting, apparatus, invention, receiver construction, portable sets.

B.—Mining and Prospecting

VICTOR SHAW, Box 958, Ketchikan, Alaska. Territory anywhere on the continent of North America. Questions on mines, mining law, mining methods or practise; where and how to prospect, how to outfit; how to make the mine after it is located; how to work it and how to sell it; general geology necessary for miner or prospector, including the precious and base metals and economic minerals such as pitchblende or uranium, gypsum, mica, cryolite, etc. Questions regarding investment or the merits of any particular company are excluded.

C.—Old Songs That Men Have Sung

A department for collecting hitherto unpublished specimens and for answering questions concerning all songs of the out-of-doors that have had sufficient virility to outlast their immediate day; chanteys, "forebitters," ballads —songs of outdoor men—sailors, lumberjacks, soldiers, cowboys, pioneers, rivermen, canal-men, men of the Great Lakes, voyageurs, railroad men, miners, hoboes, plantation hands, etc.—R. W. GORDON, care of *Adventure*.

D.—Weapons, Past and Present

Rifles, shotguns, pistols, revolvers, ammunition and edged weapons. (Any questions on the arms adapted to a particular locality should *not* be sent to this department but to the "Ask Adventure" editor covering the district.)

1.—All Shotguns, including foreign and American makes; wing shooting. JOHN B. THOMPSON ("Ozark Ripley"), care of *Adventure*.

2.—All Rifles, Pistols and Revolvers, including foreign and American makes. DONEGAN WIGGINS, R. F. D. 3, Lock Box 75, Salem, Ore.

3.—Edged Weapons, and Firearms Prior to 1800. Swords, pikes, knives, battle-axes, etc., and all firearms of the flintlock, matchlock, wheel-lock and snaphaunce varieties. (Editor to be appointed.)

E.—Salt and Fresh Water Fishing

JOHN B. THOMPSON ("Ozark Ripley"), care of *Adventure*. Fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting and bait; camping-outfits; fishing-trips.

F.—Forestry in the United States

ERNEST W. SHAW, South Carver, Mass. Big-game hunting, guides and equipment; national forests of the Rocky Mountain States. Questions on the policy of the Government regarding game and wild-animal life in the forests.

G.—Tropical Forestry

WILLIAM R. BARBOUR, care *Adventure*. Tropical forests and forest products; their economic possibilities; distribution, exploration, etc.

H.—Aviation

LIEUT.-COL. W. G. SCHAUFFLER, JR., 2940 Newark St. N. W., Washington, D. C. Airplanes; airships; aeronautical motors; airways and landing fields; contests; Aero Clubs;

Insurance; aeronautical laws; licenses; operating data; schools; foreign activities; publications. No questions answered regarding aeronautical stock-promotion companies.

I.—Army Matters, United States and Foreign

CAPT. FRED. F. FLEISCHER, care *Adventure*. *United States:* Military history, military policy. National Defense Act of 1920. Regulations and matters in general for organized reserves. Army and uniform regulations, infantry drill regulations, field service regulations. Tables of organization. Citizens' military training camps. *Foreign:* Strength and distribution of foreign armies before the war. Uniforms. Strength of foreign armies up to date. History of armies of countries covered by Mr. Fleischer in general, "Ask Adventure" section. *General:* Tactical questions on the late war. Detailed information on all operations during the late war from the viewpoint of the German high command. Questions regarding enlisted personnel and officers, except such as are published in Officers' Directory, can not be answered.

J.—Navy Matters

LIEUT. FRANCIS GREENE, U. S. N. R., 241 Eleventh Street, Brooklyn, N. Y. Regulations, history, customs, drill, gunnery; tactical and strategic questions, ships, propulsion, construction, classification; general information. Questions regarding the enlisted personnel and officers except such as contained in the Register of Officers can not be answered. International and constitutional law concerning naval and maritime affairs.

K.-American Anthropology North of the Panama Canal

ARTHUR WOODWARD, Museum of American Indians, 155th St. and Broadway, N. Y. C. Customs, dress, architecture, pottery and decorative arts, weapons and implements, fetishism, social divisions.

L.—First Aid on the Trail

CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, M. D., Falls City, Neb. Medical and surgical emergency care, wounds, injuries, common illnesses, diet, pure water, clothing, insect and snake-bite; industrial first aid and sanitation for mines, logging camps, ranches and exploring parties as well as for camping trips of all kinds. First-aid outfits. Meeting all health hazard, the outdoor life, arctic, temperate and tropical zones.

M.—Health-Building Outdoors

CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, M. D., Falls City, Neb. How to get well and how to keep well in the open air, where to go and how to travel. Tropical hygiene. General health-building, safe exercise, right food and habits, with as much adaptation as possible to particular cases.

N.—Railroading in the U. S., Mexico and Canada

R. T. NEWMAN, Box 833, Anaconda, Mont. General-office, especially immigration, work; advertising work, duties of station agent, bill clerk, ticket agent, passenger brakeman and rate clerk. General information.

O.—Herpetology

DR. G. K. NOBLE, American Museum of Natural History, 77th St., and Central Park West, New York, N. Y. General information concerning reptiles (snakes, lizards, turtles, crocodiles) and ar hibians (frogs, toads, salamanders); their customs, habi and distribution.

P.—Entomology

DR. FRANK E. LUTZ, Ramsey, N. J. General information about insects and spiders; venomous insects, disease-carrying insects, insects attacking man, etc.; distribution.

Q.—STANDING INFORMATION

For **Camp-Fire Stations** write LAURENCE JORDAN, care *Adventure*.

For general information on **U. S. and its possessions** write Supt. of Public Documents, Wash, D. C., for catalog of all Government publications. For **U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries**, the Dept. of Com., Wash., D. C.

For the **Philippines, Porto Rico**, and customs receivierships in **Santo Domingo** and **Haiti**, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dept., Wash., D. C.

For **Alaska**, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For **Hawaii**, Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, T. H. Also, Dept. of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For **Cuba**, Bureau of Information, Dept. of Agrl., Com. and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

The Pan-American Union for general information on **Latin-American matters** or for specific data. Address L. S. ROWE, Dir. Gen., Wash., D. C.

For **R. C. M. P.**, Commissioner Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can. Only unmarried British subjects, age 18 to 40, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs.

For **State Police of any State**, FRANCIS H. BENT, JR., care of *Adventure*.

For **Canal Zone**, the Panama Canal Com., Wash., D. C.

National **Rifle** Association of America, Brig. Gen. Fred H. Phillips, Jr., Sec'y, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Wash., D. C.

United States **Revolver** Ass'n. W. A. MORRALL, Sec'y-Treas., Hotel Virginia, Columbus, O.

National Parks, how to get there and what to do when there. Address National Park Service, Wash., D. C.

For whereabouts of **Navy men**, Bureau of Navigation, Navy Department, Wash., D. C.

Cuba

LABORING jobs are impossible to get.

Request:—"Would appreciate the answers to the following inquiries:

1. How is the climate of Cuba, taken the year round? Is it fairly moderate and even? Or are there extremes?

2. How are the working conditions?

3. What chance, if any, is there for a young man, in good health, and used to the hardest, most active kind of outdoor work to get steady employment?

4. Are living conditions somewhat like the United States?

5. How much money would a person have to have, at the very least, to carry on after arriving?" —E. R., Los Angeles, Cal.

Reply, by Mr. Montgomery:—1. The climate of Cuba is extremely even, there being no great variations in temperature. The average temperature for Cuba is 77 degrees Fahrenheit.

2. Working conditions in Cuba are such that one can not compete, that is as a laborer.

The better positions, where executive ability is necessary, are usually filled by Americans or English. However, these positions require expert knowledge in their particular field, and are hard to obtain, also a thorough knowledge of Spanish.

3. Absolutely none as a laborer. If you are skilled in any line, it is possible by advertising in some journal in the States to obtain employment with firms operating in Cuba.

4. Decidedly no. Living conditions are entirely different, only in Havana are conditions anywhere near that in the States and a great deal more expensive.

5. If you contemplated coming to Cuba and looking for employment you would need considerable funds as there is no telling when you could locate work.

To live in Havana just at this time is extremely expensive as the "Tourist Season" is beginning.

Hotel rates are higher and the cafés and restaurants catering to Americans or foreigners are very high in their prices.

According to the Cuban law you would have to have thirty dollars before entry; however, this would not be sufficient for but a few days.

My advice to you is to try and obtain a position

with some concern like the United Fruit Co. of Boston, Mass., who employ numbers of men on their plantations. Write to them stating your qualifications, and it is possible they can use you.

Do not by any means come to Cuba to look for a laborer's job as it is impossible to work at such. Perhaps you are better off at home.

Any further information you desire will be gladly furnished if you will enclose International Reply Coupons, United States stamps are not acceptable in Cuba.

The full statement of the departments, as given in this issue, is printed only in alternate issues.

Millions of Acres

CATTLE raising in Brazil.

Request:—"Would you please answer the following questions for me?

My partner and myself are thinking of going to Bolivia or western Brazil to engage in cattle ranching. Would between $500 and $1000 be enough for the two of us to start in with? I understand that there are lots of wild cattle that a person could use for a foundation and import bulls of good breeding to improve the herd; is this true? How much are cattle, say half Herefords or Shorthorn, worth? Are the native cattle worth anything?

Are there any wild horses there? How is land acquired in western Brazil? I understand that in Bolivia land can be acquired for ten cents a hectare, but there has to be a family on each two thousand five hundred acres. Could we get two thousand hectares between us or would we be able to only get eighty hectares apiece?

How about the climate; is it very unhealthful? We are used to working in the open as we are lumbermen.

Would there be any money in getting a steam-launch and going trading on the upper Amazon? What kind of trade goods are used? I understand that rubber and nuts are the main articles traded for. Are hides and plumes of any value?

Is there any placer gold to be found in your district. Do you think it would pay to go prospecting? Which do you think would pay best; ranching prospecting, or trading?

Would a thirty-thirty rifle and a thirty-eight-forty revolver apiece be enough, with a .22 rifle, in the way of armament?

We want to have some fun and adventure as well as work.

Please don't publish my name and address."—K. S., Oregon.

Reply, by Mr. Edgar Young:—There are millions of acres, hundreds of thousands of square miles of undeveloped country in western Brazil and eastern Bolivia, and no doubt some part of this would be suitable for cattle ranching provided you found it.

Chances are that no one would even trouble to ask you about buying land if you settled in some part of it.

In this portion there are few if any cattle now. Your idea of great herds of wild cattle is erroneous. There are some few wild cattle in southern Brazil where many cattle are raised but these are strays that have been allowed to run wild and now and again the native cattle ranchers have a sort of round up and hunt for them. Millions of cattle are raised in Parana and Rio Grande do Sul states and there is another cattle raising country up farther north near the mouth of the Amazon.

Most of the native cattle in Brazil are crossed with Zebu to avoid tick fever and other cattle diseases. There are some wonderful looking cattle in Parana and Rio Grande do Sul and some mighty fine ponies and cowboys also. It is something like what it was in the West years ago. This country is about two thousand five hundred miles east of where you are figuring on going. There are two companies raising cattle just on the border of Bolivia and Argentine and also Bolivia and Paraguay.

Much of this country is under water at certain seasons and is rather risky for a man taking up land without he knows the conditions. There is fine cattle country in Paraguay, Uruguay, and Argentine as well as parts of Chile. Cattle do well in Colombia and also Venezuela. The chances are you could raise them where you figure on and if you got some stock up into there you would not have to figure on feeding them at any time of the year and you could sell them by rafting them down the rivers to the Amazon.

If I were you I would read what I could about that portion of the world, and then go down and look it over at first hand and then come back out and arrange for what I decided on. For a start write Pan American Union, Washington, D. C. for their booklets "Brazil" and "Bolivia." See article in the Encyclopedia Britannica under same headings. You can get the names of a number of books covering both countries from the Pan American Union later and get a good idea before starting out.

There is gold to be found in many of the streams over in that vicinity.

Straits Settlements Sports

ANYTHING from fireback pheasant to rhinoceros.

Request:—"Kindly inform me where I can purchase a text-book on the Malay language, or the dialects of it as spoken in the Straits Settlements?

What are the prospects of sport, *i.e.*, hunting and fishing? I have shot practically all varieties of American big game, and am an adopted member of the Piegan tribe of the Siksika or Blackfoot Confederacy."—R. M. Niles, Nicholson, Pa.

Reply, by Mr. MacCreagh:—I am sorry that I can't tell you where you can get a Malay text-book—in New York. There exists a "Grammar and Dictionary of the Malay Language" by John Crawford, as well as a "Manual of the Malay Language" by Sir William Maxwell; both published in London.

If you could get hold of either of these, they would give you just what you need, as the Malay sounds have been transposed from the Arabic into the Roman characters; and you will find these characters pretty well understood throughout British as well as Dutch Malaya.

As to sport—man, man; if you make your headquarters at Singapore, for instance, quite short trips will put you within reach of anything from fireback

pheasant to rhinoceros. Any outfit that you might need in addition to what you already have can be purchased as well, if not better, and certainly cheaper, in Singapore than in this country.

If you intend to make the trip—which I envy you—you would do well to get in touch with the "Malay States Information Agency," 88 Cannon St., London, E.C., who will send you, for 50 cents, the official handbook on "Big Game," containing all the information you could wish to know—localities, habits, licenses, and so forth.

You might also ask for "Malaya," a very comprehensive book on the country by Dr. R. O. Winstedt, published by Constable & Co., price 10 shillings. The agency would also get the grammar for you if you ask them to do so. Sorry I can't tell you the price of the latter. Anyway, you could leave it to the agency to send you the latest work without sticking you.

Aviation Schools

THERE is something better.

Request:—"May I ask you a few questions in regard to aviation? Will you give me the address of a good school which teaches you to be an airplane mechanic and flying also, and one that just teaches flying.

What would these positions pay and what are the chances of getting a job in this line? Can a person learn to fly an airplane in a six-hour course? Yours for keeping the U.S. ahead in aviation."—J. R. Booker, Trinidad, Colo.

Reply, by Lt. Schauffler:—You would be surprised to know how many requests I get for information regarding schools. It seems to me that all the young men in the country are wanting to learn how to fly. It is a darn good sign and just goes to show that aviation in the United States is going to take a jump during the next few years.

There are any number of civilian aviation schools all over the country, but my advice to you is to save your money; it would cost you about six to seven hundred dollars to learn how to just barely stagger around through the air, and by the time you were allowed to "solo"—or fly alone—you wouldn't be fit to take any kind of a job with any first-class commercial operating company or with the Air Mail.

If I were in your place I would take advantage of the training offered by the United States Army Air Service. I am enclosing some literature on the qualifications necessary for admission to the Cadet Course. If you take that course in flying and get your commission in the Air Service Reserve you will have had a training that is worth something and you'll be a darn good pilot. As a graduate of a civilian school your chances of getting a job would be darn poor, while a graduate of the Army school is always in a position to get a job, if there are any to be had. It takes a man a full hundred hours in the air, under all kinds of conditions, to become a pilot—that is an honest-to-God pilot—one who can fly anything, anywhere, at any time.

Good luck to you, and if there is anything more I can do for you don't hesitate to call on me.

Hawaii

MORE clerks than jobs.

Request:—1. "Is there a chance for an outsider to get work in Honolulu or Waikiki Beach in Hawaii—by work I am referring to work in an office such as a file clerk, shipping clerk, etc.

2. Do salaries run the same as in the States?

3. Can one live as cheap as in the States?

4. Is there any enmity toward a person from the States?

5. Can one be hired in New York or San Francisco for work in Hawaii?

Please use only my initials if this is printed in *Adventure*."—F. G., N. Y. C.

Reply, by Mr. Halton:—Sorry that I can not encourage you with reference to a clerical position in Hawaii—there are usually more applicants than can be accommodated for every such position right in Honolulu without having to send to the mainland. For your information, Hawaii is part of the United States and therefore it is not correct to write "as in the States."

Under no circumstances would I suggest that you go to Honolulu seeking employment unless you are provided with sufficient funds to return in case you are unsuccessful.

Free service, but don't ask us to pay the postage to get it to you.

Kipping on Rigging

CLEARING up some of the finer points of the technique of the old days of single top sails.

Request:—"I have been studying two books of Kipping, an English authority on masting and rigging in the old days of single top sails; most of the descriptions are clear to me but there are some points about which I do not understand and I append a list of questions which I hope you may find time to answer.

Position of Fore Topmast Staysail.

1. The fore topmast stay is described as two lines, one coming down on each side of the bowsprit and reeving through bees on the sides of the bowsprit, thence carried in to the bow where they are taken up with dead eyes.

Is the staysail bent upon one of these two stay lines so that it is off-center on the bowsprit?

Lower Masthead Pendants.

2. I am making a model of a brig at sea: please state if these tackles for sending up and lowering the topmasts are permanent fixtures or if they are taken down when not in use.

Slings for Lower Yard.

3. Kipping states that a hole is made in the forepart of top for the slings for this yard; I do not understand if this hole is for making fast the slings or for passing it through to the masthead. Would a block be used with the slings on this standing yard?

Lower Stays.

4. The main stay, for instance, appears to be made of two lines, each looped over the masthead

and two tied together at a point eight or ten feet ahead of the mast, one line coming down to the deck on each side of the foremast.

5. Is one of these lines the stay and the other the preventer or spring stay? What is the difference between these two types of stays?

Backstays.

6. What is the difference between "breast" and "standing" backstays?

Shrouds on the upper masts.

7. Upon the sketch below I show a skysail pole fitted on to the royal masthead, abaft it, as appears to have been the practice; is my arrangement of the shrouds correct, topgallant, royal and skysail shrouds all coming down together to the same points on the cross-trees?

Degallant shrouds pass through clamp in cross trees and set up in top with hearts. Royal shroud set up in top with purchase, probably same for skysail shroud which was single. Royal shroud and backstay are in one row through side eye of mast band and seized; backstay set up with dead eye.

Royal and Skysail Halyards.

8. I understand that the topsail and topgallant yards are hoisted with the use of a sheave wheel built into the mast; are the royal and skysail yards hoisted with a block fastened on the front of the mast?

9. Please describe how the royal and skysail halyards should come down to the pine rail; should they be ahead of the mast or abaft it?

Pumps.

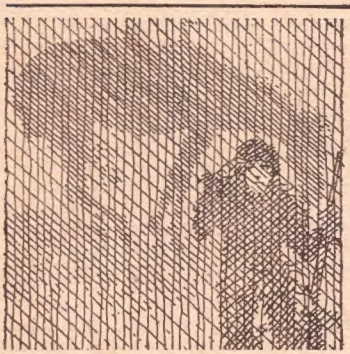
10. On these old ships of a century ago the pumps are shown located just abaft the mainmast; will you give me a sketch of the general arrangement of these pumps? Were they operated with sweeps attached to the mainmast?"

Reply, by Mr. Rieseberg:—

1. Yes.
2. Taken down when not in use.
3. Sometimes two jeer blocks are used and a skeleton hook.
4. O. K.
5. One is star, the other port lower stay. Hanks of mainstaysail go on post.
6. Breast is the foremost of the two. Backstays part of standing rigging.
7. Degallant shrouds pass through clamp in crosstrees and set up in top with hearts. Royal shroud set up in top with purchase probably same for skysail shroud, which was single. Royal shroud and backstay are in one row through side eye of a mast and seized; backstay set up in dead eye.
8. Royal and skysail halyards reeve through sheaves on mast.
9. Fore royal to port. Main royal to star. Fore skysail to star. Main skysail to port.
10. Have no data on hand pumps, though they probably had handles p. and s. and flysheets. Some were located forward of foremast to keep clear of cargo hatches, and were called head pump. Probably the one you refer to is bilge.

Accompany your inquiry with stamped, self-addressed envelop.

"ASK ADVENTURE" editors are appointed with extreme care. If you can meet our exacting requirements and qualify as an expert on some topic or territory not now covered, we shall be glad to talk matters over with you. Address JOSEPH COX, *Adventure*, New York.



LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

HRINCO, JOE S. Mother's maiden name Mary Bronczak. Age 45 years, height 5 ft., 6 in., weight 150 lbs., light brown hair and grey eyes. Left Austria for California in 1905. Mother is dead also Rose and Anne. Any information will be appreciated by his youngest sister Julia.—Address MRS. JULIA PETRECKY, Box 430, Sand Creek Road, West Albany, N. Y.

When writing LOST TRAILS in answer to an advertisement please give the date of the issue in which your name appeared.

SCULLY, JAMES STUART. Home, Lancaster, Pa. Last heard of in New Mexico. Weeks, Howard K., last heard of in Columbia, S. A., with Oil Company. Please write.— Address D. V. CROWELL, Greensburg, Pa.

MALONEY, FRANCIS R. and FRANCIS D. BROWNING. Formerly of the 33rd Infantry, Ft. Clayton, C. Z., Panama. Both believed to be in Pittsburgh, Pa. Write your buddy.—Address J. L. PRICE, Floressville, Texas.

SARGEANT, NORMAN. Last heard of in Moosejaw, Sask., but believed to have left there for Los Angeles, Calif., in the fall of 1923. Age 18 years, height now probably about 5 ft. 10 in., brown hair, blue eyes. Any information will be appreciated.—Address MRS. H. A. SARGEANT, Provincial Hospital, Battleford, Sask., Canada.

FORMER members of crew of U. S. S. *Newport* (1919-1922) who knew John D. Sullivan (Yeoman 3d cl. USNRF, later C. P. O.) Navy buddies by names of Frank

Russo, Mike Cohen, "Archie" and "Sparks" can be especially helpful. Please write.—Address LIEUT. THOMAS L. SULLIVAN, 190 Highland St., Roxbury, Mass.

ELLIS, LEONARD N. Went from Kalispell, Montana to Calgary, Canada, about Aug. of this year. Letters sent there have been returned. Height about 5 ft. 6 in., weight 130 lbs., black hair and brown eyes, swarthy complexion, prominent nose. Drives Chevrolet sport roadster which he calls "Ellis Special." Home is in Spokane, Wash. Any information will be appreciated.—Address D. W. ARCHIE, care of Thompson Inn, Butte, Mont.

WINSOR, W. F. "SHORTY." Has resided in Elko, Tonopah and McGill, Nevada, Pendleton Ohio. Last heard from in Wichita, Kansas. Information will be appreciated.—Address E. H. COOK, 43 Lackawanna Ave., Norwich, New York.

HAYNES, GENA ROBERTSON. Nurse. Supposed to be working in Florida or Middle West. Any information will be appreciated by her husband.—Address JAMES N. HAYNES, 1503 N. Bethel St., Baltimore, Md.

THE following have been inquired for in the past two years.

ALBERT, HELEN C.; Allan, Albert Victor; Allen, Prescott C.; Adams, Joe; Allison, Mary; Anderson, Thomas A.; Abbott, W. V.; Applegate, William F.; Arthur, D. F. Jr.; Arcand, D.; Andersen, Louis; Armer, John; Anderson, Harold; Anderson, John Howie; Andrews, John Oates; Atkinson, Finley; Augustine, Miss Elizabeth; Baker, J. O.; Bailey, Donald; Baker, Capt. James J.; Baldridge, Capt.; Baldwin, Chas. or Joe Herbert; Baker, Ray A.; Bacon, Leo; Bassett, George; Barr, Joseph L.; Bateman, Leonard; Barbour, Mr. & Mrs. Clarence; Bell, Harry; Bedortha, Harry F.; Beames, Joe; Beale, Arthur; Bernstein, Abe; Berry, Lee; Beyersdorfer, Albert G. (Joe Bush); Bettschen, George F.; Best, Christine and Catharine; Blystone, Vernon; Bloomenthal, James; Bowman, Jesse; Boggs, Jack J.; Bonter, Max; Boston, Charles C.; Bowden, Laurence Warren; Bowers, Sarah; Bolan, Thomas; Boggs, Jack J.; Bon, Walter C.; Bohannan, Delbert; Branson, Hosea L. (Billy); Braden, James Blain; Brendle, John; Briggs, Charles Harvey; Braley, Ralph; Bridges, Alfred Renton; Brigham, Franklin Wilson; Brothen, Carl or Charley; Brown, Carl; Brockman, C. A.; Brotherton, George Henry; Brown, George; Brown, Lennox Denham; Burnson, Charlie Acel; Buckley, Jim; Burdick, L. H.; Burns, Bob or Ralph Scott; Burrough, Stanley; Bushby, Edward T.; Bussell, Alvia; Bunce, William J.; Caples, Albert; Cate, William C.; Caine, Austin; Carkeek, Charles; Campbell, Robert; Carter, Henry B.; Card, Frank; Chislom, Robert; Clarence, Roy P.; Classick, Paul H.; Challis, Anna; Clute, Henry C.; Charles H.; Clarke, Corporal; Clark, Tom (Slim); Coghlan, C. C.; Collins, Chas. or Mack; Cohen, Mike; Cooper, Andrew D.; Costelloe, Jack; Cook, Harvey Lawrence; Conniston, Art; Connors, Eugene or Gene (Chuck); Connolly, Jack (John Joseph); Corning, Harold; Crews, Herman R.; Cuddeback, Lavina G.; Curts, Frank E.; Crosby, J. H.; Cunningham, R.; Cummins, Norman; Culberson, Albert James; Daly, Charles; Davis, Lester; Davis, Lillian; Daughtery John; Daley, John F.; Davis, Andrew Lester; Day, Herbert; De Foe, Clarence; Dean, Mamie; Devine, Willard; Dealey, Daniel T.; Dean, Will; Dillmore, Jack; Dickens, Allan; Dohl, Frank; Douglas, Wallace; Drinkard, Emary P.; Dreyer, Herbert; Douglas, William; Donnelly, John; Dunston, Arnold; Durning, Frank L.; Duffield, Harry A.; Dutton, Lousa or Lousa Thomas or Elizabeth Brin; Duffield, Harry; Edwards, Thomas; Eadon, Lionel Alfred; Eams, Ralph; Edmund, K. B; Erdtmann, Gustave F.; Erwin, George Richard; Faries, Cecil R.; Fessenden, Robert; Fanning, Denitt; Fellows, J. H. or Jay; Farr, Goebel; Farren, Jack; Fleisch, Florence; Flack, Isaac M.; Fitzgerald, Lewis C.; Flynn, Mrs. Ella Brooker; Forsythe, Davis Henry; Franz, Frank Futtage; France, James; Fulton Frank; Garnier, Martin; Garrabrandt, Anna B.; Gaffney, J. E. (Red); Garland, John; Gerrarde, A. C.; Gistason, Jacob; Gibbs, William H.; Geibel, J. K.; Gilligan, Sidney Roger; Giffs, Everett; Gibbs, Everett; Gillespie, James, John, Myles; Gordon, Frank; Goss, Willie; Gordon, J. H.; Green, John; Grass, Chas.; Greene, James William; Gross, Joseph Leo; Hagen, August; Hale, Jim; Hale, Edna; Hansen, Anders; Harding, Samuel Merton or A. C. Ardell; Hart, David William; Hart, Henry S.; Hart, William J.; Hart, James; Hardy, Constance; Haas, H.; Hay, Edward William C.; Henry, James; Herridge, Albert; Hillerby, Robert J.; Hines, Hugh W.; Hoffman, William; Hogan, R. M.; Hollis, Clarence C.; Holland, James Arthur; Holloway, Hemer M.; Holly, A. J.; Holmes, Elmer; Holliday, Robert Emmett; Holmes, Perley; (Pus); Hoag, H.; Hooker, Lynn, and Jake Archer; Howe, Charles; Howell, James Edgar; Hoste, Hickman; Howe, Frank A.; Hopkins, Louis; Hubbard, William Augustus; Isaac, Maurice; Ingle, Horace; Jackson, James Bangle; James, Moses; Jennings, Joe Jeffers, Major Leon; Johnson, Walter and Durcy; Johnson, J. E.; Johnson, Theodore, William, Oscar and Irene; Kane, Thomas Edward; Karelle, Lieut. L.B.U.S.N.; Kay, Thomas Macalpine; Keith, Henry; Kelly, John H.; Kephart, Steve John, Peter; Knight, John; King, John (Turk); Kilgore, Millard F.; King, Joseph Stanley; Lambert, Edwin; Larrett, Henry; Landahl, Harry; Le Par, Jean; Larrimer, Ned C.; La Chapelle, Ensebe; Lalla, George; Leider, Joseph; Le Mire, Martha, Mrs; Le Rouge, Harry; Lederer, Abe; Lewis, Oscar; Leggat, John; Lemley, Pop; Little, Mary Ann Weston; Little, Thomas; Long, Leonard C.; Loomis, Albert B.; Loper, Fred; Lusk, John; Loosley, Earle; Lovett, Charles; Locke, Charles F.; Lucas, Arthur; McCoy, W. C.; McDonald, Mrs. Anna; McDermott, Dr. Gordon; McDonald, James; McKelberg, A. J.; McElligott, Eva Margory; McDonald, Robert; McKay, John; McLoughlin, Peter-McCalmont, Margaret; McCarroll, Chas.; McGee, Martin; McCarthy, Joseph A.; McLaughlin, Francis; McRae, Norman N.; McMahon, Andy; McMorrow, Paddy and Denis; McTurnal, James; Mallott, Willard E.; Mann, Herbert Jr.; MacDonald, Fred B. (Bozo); Manuel James; Martin, Henry and Emma; Mattson, John H.; May, William Sullivan; Matthew, Harry Robbins; Mayo, Benjamin; Matthews, James Andrews; Meyers, S. J.; Merton, Ed; Melin, Pete; Meacham, John L.; Mitchell, Etta; Mitchell, Dr. Gordon; Mockley, J. E.; Morgan, John; Morgan, Newton A.; Morgan, Walter V.; Moore, Anna; Moughan, Patrick; Morrison, Mrs. Edith; Moore, George W.; Murphy, George; Murray, Richard H.; Muir, Will Carter; Newton, Lucy Caroline, Miss and father; Neilsen, Seibert; Nordahl, Thomas; Noble, William Nathan; Nolan Paul F.; Nolte, Walter; Norsworthy, Tom; Olson, Lawrence T.; Odell, Wm. E.; O'Connor, John J.; Ordway, Charles P.; Orenak, Tom; Otterson, Thomas James; Paxton, Christer H.; Parrish, Harry; Pariera, G. W. Mrs. (nee Jessie Isabel Kelly); Padgett, Jennings A.; Patdo, Alejandro; Petterson, John; Perrett or Perett Ferdinand; Phillips, Fred Dillard; Plumtree, Arthur Sawyer; Pruitt, John and Roy; Puzar, Julius; Prince, Geo. X; Prince, Philip J.; Pugh, William Alonza; Pugh, James W.; Rahilly, Richard H.; Rahmer, William; Raymond, Fred; Reed, Claude; Reger, Andrew (Emdre); Renz, Carrie; Reed, Claud; Reilly, Fred W.; Ragsdale, T. P.; Reed, Mrs. Jack E.; Rance, Andrews; Renard, Claud and Irven; Reeves, Reginald Floyd; Richards, Charles; Rhodes, C. D.; Richmond, Earl; Rivet, Fred; Rogers, Ellis; Rost, John S.; Rose or Ruzicka, Charlie; Roycroft, Lloyd C.; Rosenfeld, Max; Ryan, James A.; Ruff, Harold; Ryan, Ernet W.; St. John, Gaylord or Lester; Sands, Mrs. Alice N.; Sands, Gordon L.; Schabaru, Leo P.; Sharpe, Lester E.; Semple, James Lithow; Sharpe, Cecil; Sharp, John R.; Shumbarger, Edward H.; Settle, Samuel; Sahkelford, Emliss; Sidel, Al; Shannon, Carmody or Fennell; Smits, Fred H.; Smith, Robert and Samuel Burns; Sorrel, Robert; Southwick, Alfred Whales; Sowden, Francis; Spencer, Bert; Scanlon, Oliver J.; Spies, Chas. W.; Stafford, George; Stassi, John; Stevenson, I. J.; Stringfellow, Harry and Jesse; Sprecker, L. W.; Styring, Howard A.; Stewart, Robert; Steen, Lew (or Stein); Stafford, J.; Stockman, Ed and Hardy; Sprague, W. A.; Stapley, James; Stevenson, Willis B.; Swenson, Rosie; Tainton, Blain A.; Tallman, George; Tarbell, Elliott; Tanner, Dick; Tereume, Auguste; Thorp, William; Thompson, W. T.; Thompson, Myron and Lawrence; Theal, Arthur; Thomas, William, Isabelle, Fred, Arthur and Frank; Tillman, Albert; Tomlin, Bradley; Trainor, Owen P.; Tomb, William; Trostler, Joseph S.; Tucker, Lorenzo; Uhl, James (Red); Van Marter, Frank E.; Vincent, Ted; Vitie, Alexander M.; Van Heldren, T. C.; Vesper, Pvt. Otto; Walters, Harry A.; Walker, Red; Watkins, Thomas; Wanless, R. B.; Wesley, R.; White, Chester Allen; White, George; White, Dan; Willis, Frank; Wilson, George; Williams, Charles H.; Williams, Thomas R.; Williams, Ernest; Wilson, Oliver; Williams, E.; Wieritsch, Wm.; Williams, Jonathan Robertson; Wolff, Chris; Wood, Elmer; Woodward, Lee R.; Wojeik, Mrs. Catherine Schilling; Worthington, Pvt. Albert Edward; Woolweever, Adolph Richard and Benjamin Franklin; Younglove, J. W.; Younglove, Emily; Zwinge, Henry J.

MISCELLANEOUS—Relatives of Hazel Chreiman; Z. T. H.; Ike; Would be glad to hear from any of the boys who soldiered with me in Co. K. U. S. Infantry during war; Will M. L. who has sole copy of poem commencing "Music and Song and the Rhythmic Dance" write N. D. V. M. Tex.; C. O. M.; Will the man who was our guest in Cherokee County, Texas, in March, 1923 and who claimed to be one of the Dalton brothers, please correspond; Would like to hear from Camp-Fire members; Jack, please send for Beaty as soon as possible; Dave or "Sandy;" Carl P. or Laurence Earl M.; Loyd; C. F. E.; Joe; Women members of Camp-Fire please write to me; Buck; Burke; U. S. S. *Chicago* members of her crew from April 6, 1917 while in "Rio" and South American ports; E. N. T. G.; Fellow shipmates and gobs who were

in Barracks 946 East Company 670, Regiment 9, in Camp Farragut, Great Lakes, Ill. during January 1919 or in the Gunners' Mate School, Barracks C, Company A, Regiment 11, Main Station, Great Lakes Naval Training Station, Great Lakes, Ill. during Feb. and March, 1919 or in Unit 17, North U. S. Naval Hospital, Great Lakes, Ill. during April, 1919 are asked to write to a disabled gob; I would be pleased to hear from any one in the Zipperien family; J. W. H. Jack; Charles; C. B.; Ek.; Honey; Tom, Celeste needs an operation; W. N. S.; Manlove family; Case family; Chuck, Harris, Iikwabbe, Slim Hawkensm, Big Clamence, Wild Bill Cody, Ed Larson, Tex Farrel, Kid Reynolds, Charles Warrant, Gus Hughes, Jean Stuarett; Short Murrey, Ed Rice of Dallas, Texas Jack Kennedy; Ewart; Would like to hear from any of the boys of Battery A, 2nd U. S. Field Artillery; F. P. H.; Hughie; Wanted to hear from any one who went to France in 3rd Detachment of labor foremen; Would like to hear from any of the boys who were in Co. D, 9th Inf. Second Division; Bjelke; R. D. S.; Anderson or Burns; Would like to hear from old comrades who served with Bechuanaland African Charter Co. Police from 1888 to 1894, before and during the Matabele War; "Snake Eye Scotty"; Brother and two sisters; Troop K. Fifth Cavalry. Members Petry, Kelly Thompson, G. O. or any others that were in Mexico in 1919; "Coffeebeans" William; W. A. S. Important good news. Letter with *Adventure* Camp-Fire. Get it right away. Everything O.K.; Moussier, Alfred Roy, Hollywood, William Allen, any member of Co. F. 7th Reg. U. S. N.; Any information as to P. J. Lynch, Robert Auburn and F. J. Temple who were in Mexico and C. A.; F 9 F. A. Captain R. W. McClure, B. C. F. 9 F. A. 1917-19 Arthur Houston, Pvt. 33 sec. F. 9 F. A. Information is required as to the whereabouts of these men; Kyd Gyp and Shanghai; Would like to hear from anyone that was overseas with me in Co. "I" 11 regiment U. S. Marines; Ralph write to your old pard; Would like to hear from those who knew me while serving in Camp Supply Detachment, Q. M. C. Camp Merritt, N. J.; Annie; Darling Jack please let me know where you are; Angle; "Batesy" or Decsty; Bert; C. F. E.; Ex-Marines of 7th Co.; Kaufman; Mitchell; Munroe; Red Potter, Tommy Watson, Robert Burton or any of the old crowd from the Glen or Palisade Ave.; Stinson; W. C. N.; W., Charles; T. O.; S. O. L.; Happy Davis, Johnny Lisse, Jack "Sheik" Pollock and Harry Blackman; E. S. J.; Arthur; Dewers, Jack, Marty McGee, Arthur Harriss; Luiz; Shipp family; Bud; Would like to hear from any member of the old 21st Balloon Co. from the date of 1919 to 1922; A. R. P.; Would like to hear from any of my pals in Pittsburgh, north side; W. W. W.; James Moses, Joe Vreo, Jack Spellman and Mac MacLeod; Anyone knowing the whereabouts of Stewart W. Cairncorss or Frank Veidiglione, who were soldiers in the Ordnance Dept. of Raritan Arsenal, Metuchen, New Jersey in 1920.

THE following have been inquired for in either the Dec. 30, 1925 or Jan. 20, 1926 issues of Adventure. They can get the name and address of the inquirer from this magazine.

BROWN, JOHN W.; Brownell, Douglas; Burquette, Frenchie; Davis, William A.; Deval, Ralph; Freel or Friel, William or Sydney; Furaro, Danton; Halton, Fred; Hydrick, Edith Adelaide; Jones, William; Killie, Frank; McMillan, James; Macklain, Charles, Laurance; Ralph, Martney; Robinson, James H.; Rogers, Arthur; Schudolska, Esther; Sellen, Robert; Sharpe, Cecil; Smith, Grover C.; Welch, Andrew; Werner, Andy C.A.; Windross, Raymond H.

MISCELLANEOUS—Pop; Mitchell, Wm. K. Sanborn, Burke *et al* or any member of the old Staff Non-Commissioned Officers, Club of Coblenz; Will any men that I served with in Haiti in 1917 to 1920, or in the Rifle Range Detachment, at Quantico, Va. 1921 to 1923 please write.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

FEBRUARY 20TH ISSUE

Besides the **complete novel** and the **two complete novelettes,** mentioned on the second contents page of this issue, the next *Adventure* will bring you the following stories:

BLACK MAGIC — *William Westrup*
African natives work shrewdly.

THE DISCOVERERS OF AMERICA Tales of American Seafaring — *Don Waters*
Who was the first?

THE MESSENGER OF DESTINY A Three Part Story Part II — *Talbot Mundy*
Tros was loyal to his men.

LONG BOB FROM RAPAHOE — *Alan LeMay*
Too many man-hunters.

THE LOST VENUS — *George E. Holt*
No foreigner dared go among the Sons of Musa.

GOING ON — *Clements Ripley*
What the prospector willed, he did.

STILL FARTHER AHEAD

THE THREE ISSUES following the next will contain *long* stories by Leo Walmsley, John Dorman, Arthur O. Friel, W. Ryerson Johnson, Thomson Burtis, William Byron Mowery, Hugh Pendexter, W. C. Tuttle and L. Patrick Greene; and short stories by George Bruce Marquis, Captain Dingle, Romaine H. Lowdermilk, Ralph R. Perry, Raymond S. Spears, Kenneth Malcolm Murray, T. T. Flynn, Charles Victor Fischer, John Joseph, William Westrup, Post Sargent, Fairfax Downey, Robert Carse, L. Paul, James Parker Long and others; stories of adventure all around the world.

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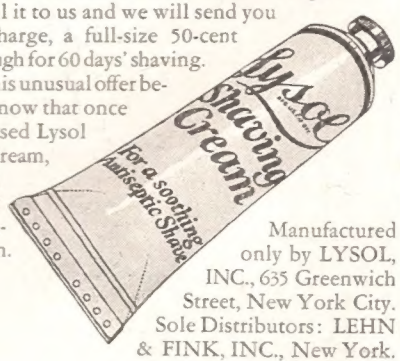

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